VOLUME 17
NUMBER 5

AMAZING STORIES

MAY
1943

BRIDGE OF BANISHMENT *by Leroy Yerxa*

See BACK COVER

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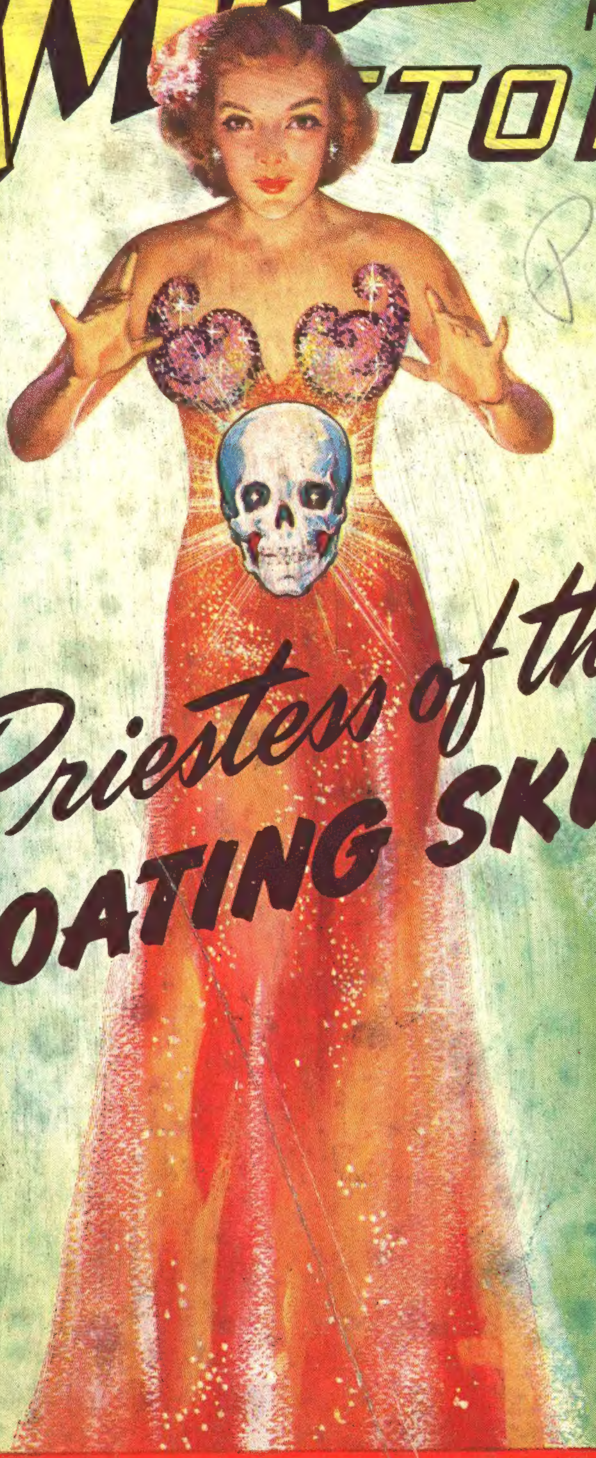

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Priestess of the FLOATING SKULL

by
EDWIN
BENSON

The ORDEAL OF LANCELOT BIGGS *by* NELSON S. BOND

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Front cover painting by H. W. McCauley, illustrating a scene from "Priestess Of The Floating Skull"
Back cover painting by Frank R. Paul, depicting an other-world scene from "Stories Of The Stars"
Illustrations by Robert Gibson Jones; Robert Fuqua; H. W. McCauley; Malcolm Smith; Julian S. Krupa; Joe Sewell

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AMAZING STORIES
MAY
1943

Published monthly by ZIFF-DAVIS PUBLISHING COMPANY at 540 North Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Ill. New York Office, 270 Madison Ave., New York City. Washington Bureau, Occidental Hotel, Lt. Col. Harold E. Hartney. London editorial representative, A. Spenser Allberry, Chandos Cottage, Court Road, Ickenham, Uxbridge, Middx., England. Entered as second class matter October 6, 1938, at the Post Office, Chicago, Illinois, under the act of March 3rd, 1879. Subscription $2.50 a year (12 issues); Canada $3.00; Foreign $3.50. Subscribers should allow at least two weeks for change of address. All communications about subscriptions should be addressed to the Director of Circulation, Ziff-Davis Publishing Company, 540 North Michigan Ave., Chicago, Ill.

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THE OBSERVATORY

by THE Editor

THE other day an old friend of yours dropped in on us—and were we surprised! You all remember Jack West, who has done several good stories for us in the past. Well, he came into our office wearing the uniform of a Second Lieutenant. He was on his way for parts unknown. Good luck Jack! We're with you all the way.

THE snorting, roaring amphibian tractor used by the Marines to land in Jap-held territory has on several occasions sent the Nippons scurrying for cover. One of the "alligators," as the Leathernecks call them, got lost behind the enemy lines and lumbered directly into a Jap camp. The Japs are reported to have dropped everything, taking off in all directions without firing a shot. The Marines believe the Nippons thought it was some kind of a dragon.

SOME men doubtless will derive a certain amount of genuine pleasure out of the knowledge that, generally speaking, male brains weigh a little more than do female ones. The average weight for a man's brain is 48 ounces as compared to an average of 43 ounces for a woman's. However, weight seems to be no indication of the intelligence of the individual, for scientists have been unable to find evidence that there is any relation between brain size and brain quality. But smirking males, the cads, need more convincing than that.

DID you ever see a rainbow by moonlight? This, without a doubt, is an unusual phenomenon. But it is not rare.

Such a rainbow is called a *moon bow*. According to the United States Weather Bureau, the moon bow is well known to scientists, although it is not often observed, chiefly because of the faintness of the light.

Only under exceptional conditions can the colors of the bow be seen. These lunar rainbows are most likely to occur after showers on nights when the moon is bright but not too high in the heavens.

IF SOMEONE offers to bet you that there are no national legal holidays in the United States, not even the Fourth of July, don't take him up on it. For the Federal Government has no Constitutional power to prescribe legal holidays in the various states. On occasion, however, it has recognized certain days as public holidays, but these are not national legal holidays in the strict sense of the word. In various acts of Congress, the government has named New Year's Day, Washington's Birthday, Memorial Day, the Fourth of July, Labor Day, and Christmas as public holidays.

IN THE Boston war production area, an electric power shortage was threatened recently. A vertical steam turbine in a power plant developed a bad "chatter" and had to be shut down. Replacement of the worn 65-ton shaft, which measured two feet through and 30 feet high, would have meant costly delay.

But modern scientific ingenuity saved the day. An electro-deposition of copper on the shaft, varying in thickness from two to five thousandths of an inch, put it back in service within 24 hours. This was the largest plating ever attempted!

ROBERT MOORE WILLIAMS leads off this issue with "The Machine," which is typical of Bob. It's the kind of story he likes to write, and which we've found you like to read.

FESTUS PRAGNELL does another Don Hargreaves story called "Twisted Giant of Mars," which is certainly no let-down from the others of this popular series.

RETURNING soldier Richard O. Lewis writes a short about "Adam's Eve" which is something you'll get a great kick out of—to say the least. It's a time-travel yarn with a new twist to it, and that's something!

THIS seems to be an issue full of "characters" because we've got a Lancelot Biggs story by Nelson S. Bond, and a Juggernaut Jones story by A. R. McKenzie. Biggs endures an "ordeal" and Jones gets drafted! Both stories provide plenty of entertainment, although of different types.

(Continued on page 223)

The Invisible Council

DO PAST PERSONALITIES INFLUENCE OUR LIVES?

IS THERE a congregation of the great minds that once dwelt upon earth? Does their intelligence linger on to inspire those who remain—like the scent of flowers removed?

Has there ever flashed into your consciousness an amazingly clear plan or purpose—accompanied by a strange, *inaudible command* to act upon it? Have you, like many others, found success in obeying such impulses—and failure, if you scoffed and disregarded them? Do such experiences indicate that, like a musical note, we each have our harmonic—some guiding past intelligence—with which *our personal consciousness* is attuned?

There has *ever* persisted the doctrine that the eminent characters who have departed are Cosmically ordained to perpetuate their work and aims through new, *living personalities* in each age. Perhaps you, too, have observed an inexplicable similarity between *your ideals* and *inclinations* and those of a prominent personage of some other century or time.

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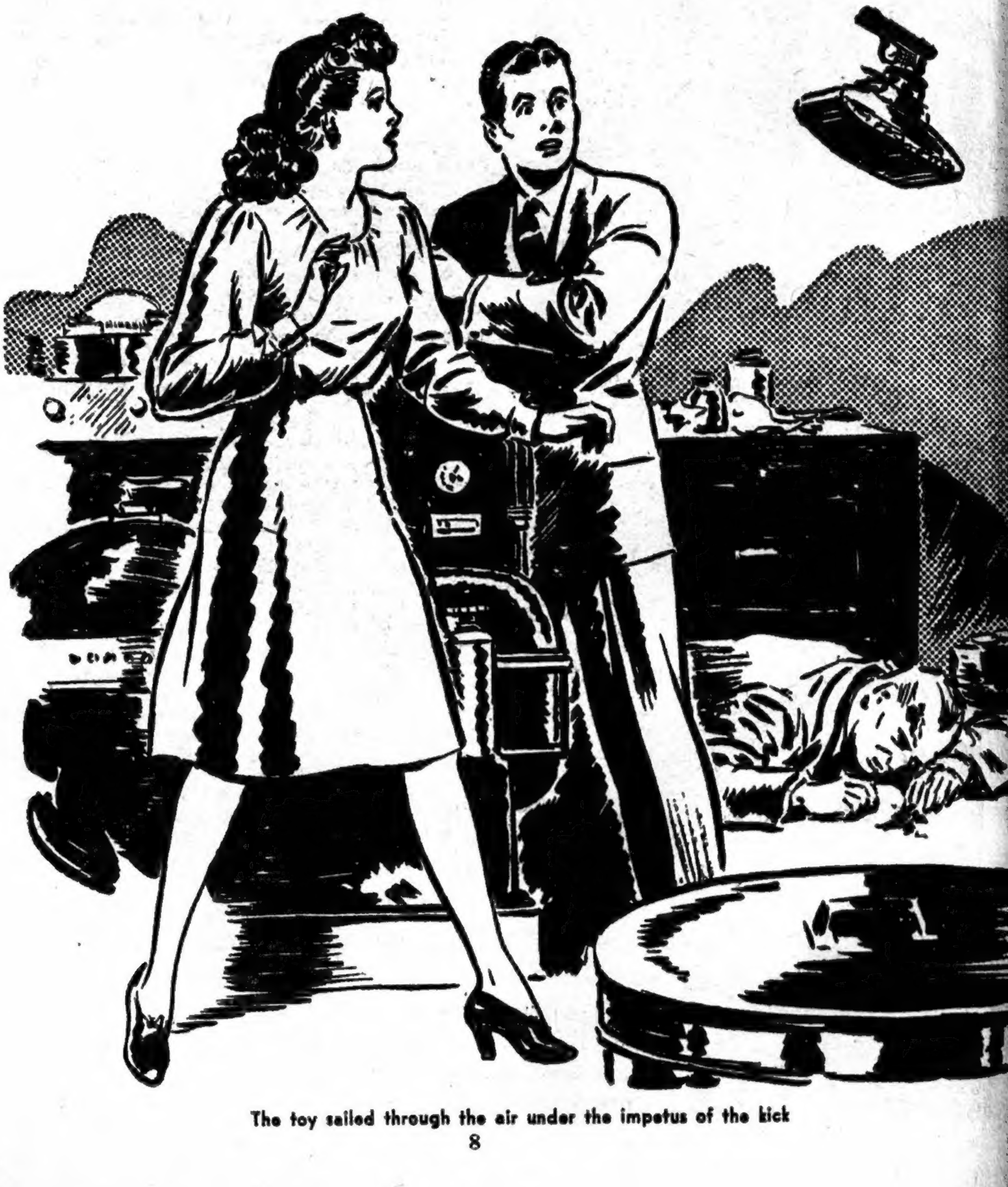
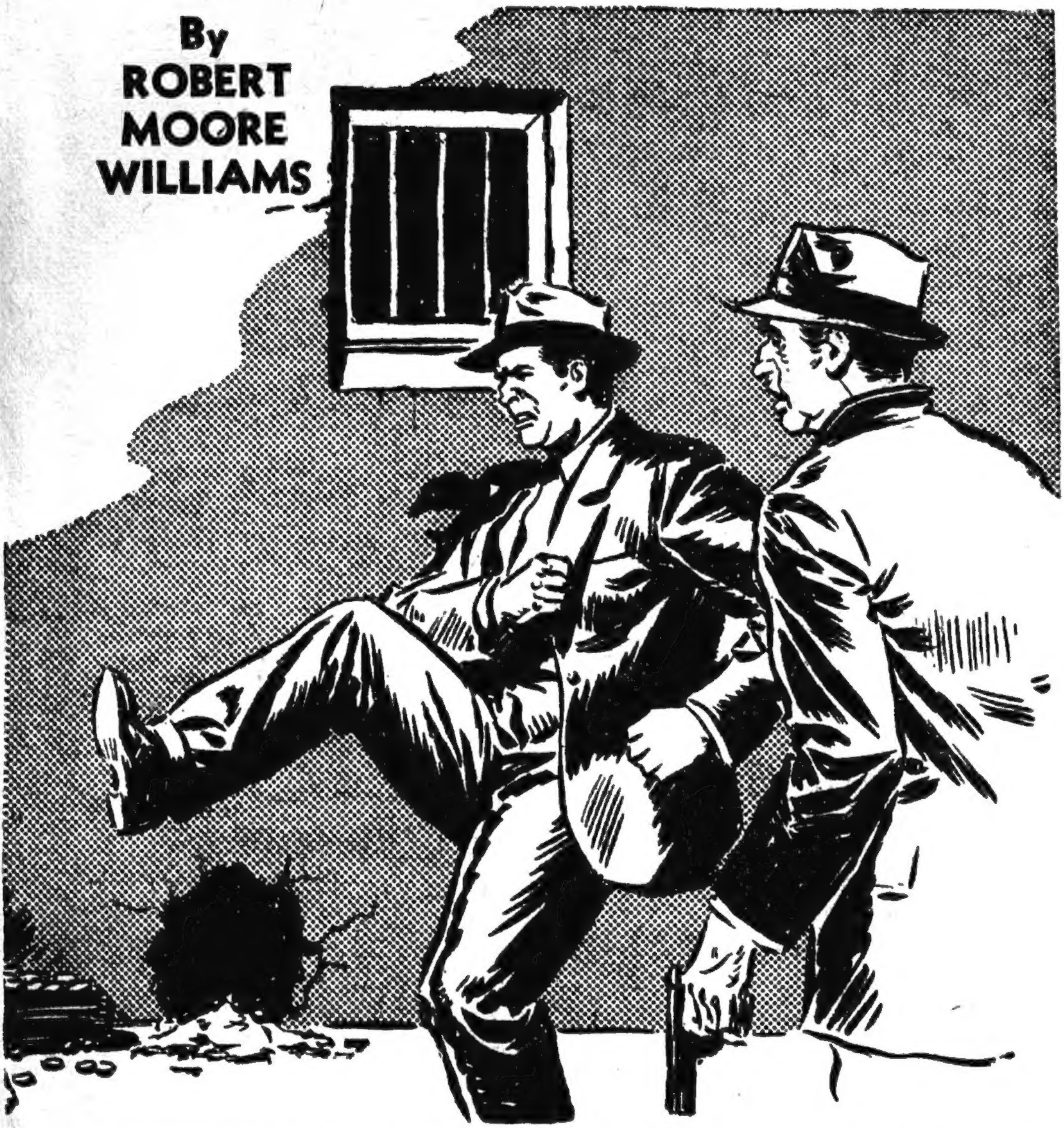
The MACHINE

GENERALLY toys are things kids play with and have a lot of fun. But these toys were not guided by childish hands, nor for amusement!



The toy sailed through the air under the impetus of the kick

By
ROBERT
MOORE
WILLIAMS



"WILLIE," Ricardo said persuasively, "I got a little job I want you to do for me tonight."

Ricardo's oily smile rang a warning bell deep in Willie's mind. "So it's happened!" he thought. Deep within him he was aware of a feeling of cold. Willie—his full name was William Mills although he never heard it spoken—was a mechanic. A young mechanic. Ricardo was his boss. Ricardo owned and operated the Four Square Garage, located on State Street just south of the Loop in Chicago. The only square thing about the garage was its name. For the benefit of the police, Ricardo operated what seemed to be on the surface an ordinary garage, with lubrication, storage, and repair services, and the casual motorist who brought in an ailing automobile found that the Four Square garage would repair it for him in the excellent repair shop on the first floor. What no casual motorist ever saw, what most of the men who worked for Ricardo never saw, was the really first-class repair shop located in the basement. The basement garage was so efficient that a car brought into it would have, within the space of an hour, a new motor number, a new serial number, a new certificate of title to match the numbers, a different set of tires, and a brand-new but not very durable paint job. Then the car, so disguised that its original owner would never recognize it, would be sent downstate and would appear on the used-car lot of an innocent dealer who would never know the true history of the car.

Ricardo dealt in hot cars.

Working for Ricardo was Willie Mills' first job. Willie didn't know what he was getting into when he asked Ricardo for a job. He had been turned down by half the garages in Chicago when he first turned up at the Four Square and timidly inquired for the owner. Ricardo gave him a job not because Willie looked like he had the makings of a mechanic—he didn't—but because he looked like a kid who had never had a square meal in his life. Ricardo could use hungry kids, if they could keep their mouths shut. And if they were dumb. Willie looked dumb enough. Ricardo gave him a job as a grease monkey. Meanwhile he kept his eye on the kid to see if Willie was the type who could be promoted from the first floor to the more important work in the basement.

Willie didn't remain a grease monkey long. He wanted to be a mechanic. Ricardo moved him to the repair department, still keeping him on the first floor, and waited to see if Willie knew enough to be a mechanic. The results amazed even Ricardo. As a mechanic, Willie was a genius. He seemed to know, intuitively, about motors. A car would come in with a sputter in the motor, one of those sneaky little things that might come from a bad coil, from a speck of dirt on a carbureter jet, or from a valve that wasn't seating properly. Willie would listen to the motor. Then he'd fix it. That was all there was to it.

Within six months Willie knew more about automobiles than all the rest of the mechanics Ricardo hired, including the experts in the basement. During that same period, Willie had never seen the basement, but he had begun to suspect what happened down there. The operations in the basement were conducted mostly at night, when the first-floor garage was closed.

NOW Ricardo was saying, with an oily smile, that he had a little job he wanted done tonight. The mechanic had little doubt about the meaning hidden behind the words. Ricardo was offering him a chance to be promoted to the basement!

Willie didn't want the promotion. In fact, under Sue's urging, he had planned to quit at the end of this week. Sue slung hash in Joe's Lunch Room around the corner. Willie had taken her to the movies, twice, red-letter nights in his life. Sue was the only girl who had ever noticed that Willie existed. Sue had better eyes than most girls. She saw under the surface.

"I got something important I want you to do for me tonight," Ricardo said smoothly. Willie saw that the boss looked nervous but was trying not to show it. "You're the best mechanic I got. There is a machine I want you to look over for me, as a favor."

Ricardo was a short, heavily-built man with a swarthy face and hard, black eyes. He had a soft, persuasive voice, and if you didn't look too closely, an engaging manner. When he wanted to, he could be suave and ingratiating. He knew exactly how to sell a dumb kid a bill of goods.

"I'm supposed to be off tonight," Willie Mills said.

"I know you are," Ricardo said sympathetically. "But if you could do something for me, as a favor, you understand, I would really appreciate it."

It was hard to say "No" to a man who talked so persuasively. But the mechanic knew better than to say "Yes." He didn't want to get mixed up in the hot car racket. The catch was—how was he going to turn Ricardo down without making the boss mad?

"I got a date tonight," Willie said. This was strictly the truth. He was taking Sue to the movies.

"You've got a *what?*" For a moment, amazement lit Ricardo's face. His eyes drilled into the thin-faced undersized youth standing across the desk from him. "What girl is big enough damned fool to go out with *you?*" he snapped angrily.

A sullen look appeared on the mechanic's face. "I got a date," he said stubbornly.

Ricardo hastily apologized. "I didn't mean it, Willie. I just didn't know you had a girl. Who is she?"

The smile on his face erased the wolfish snarl that had momentarily appeared there.

Willie was dumfounded. Ricardo was apologizing, actually apologizing, to him! He scarcely believed his own ears. He stammered out Sue's name and told the boss where she worked.

"That's fine, Willie," Ricardo said, beaming. "I mean it's fine to have a girl. A good thing for a young fellow. Now about that date with her tonight, couldn't you break it not only to do me a favor but to make yourself a piece of change at the same time?"

"Aw, gee, boss, I can't do that," Willie said.

"Why not?" Ricardo questioned. "You can call her up and explain the situation to her. She won't mind breaking the date especially when she learns there is a hundred smackers in it for you if you do this job for me?"

"A hundred smackers!" Willie gasped. In the neighborhood from which he came, the biggest bill in circulation was five dollars, and even five spots were rare. Ricardo was paying him eleven dollars a week and he had started in at nine. Almost ten weeks salary for a single night's work! It was unbelievable.

"Holy cats, boss, what do you want me to do?" Willie whispered. He was weakening fast. A hundred dollars meant undreamed-of luxury to him.

"First," Ricardo said impressively, "I'll tell you why I want you to do the job—because you're the best mechanic I ever saw, Willie. Barring none. That's why I thought of you, Willie, because the job I want done calls for the best mechanic there is."

HE paused and his eyes dug into the youth standing across the desk from him.

"A man is trying to sell me a machine," he continued. "It's a strange machine. I don't begin to understand how it works, but if it does what he said it would do— But never mind about that. What I want you to do, Willie, is to go with me and look this machine over and tell me how it works and why it works. That is all you'll have to do, Willie. Just examine a funny machine. That's everything there is to it."

"You mean," the mechanic gasped in relief, "that you don't want me to do a job for you in the basement! That's what I was scared of, that you wanted me to work on a hot—" Not until then did he notice the look on Ricardo's face. He hastily shut up.

The damage had been done. He had said too much. Ricardo didn't say a word. He just sat at his desk and stared at Willie Mills. As if it had been wiped off by a sponge, the pleasant, beaming, good-fellow mask was gone from his face. Murder looked out of his eyes. There was sudden silence in the garage office.

"How did you know about the basement?" Ricardo said quietly.

"Why, I—I—" the mechanic fumbled. He had said too much. He wasn't supposed to know what went on in the basement. It was unhealthy to know what went on downstairs, damned unhealthy. "I—uh—heard some of the fellows talking. I don't really know about the basement, Mr. Ricardo. I just heard some of the fellows say that once there was a hot car down there. That's all I know, Mr. Ricardo. Honest it is." Willie's voice trailed into silence.

Ricardo had taken a knife out of his pocket. He had snapped open the long blade. He didn't make any threatening moves with the knife. He just held it in his hand and snapped the blade with his thumb. Meanwhile he looked at the mechanic.

Willie Mills had grown up on South Halsted Street in an area that was a breeding ground for gangsters. He knew what happened to people who knew too much, especially to people who talked about what they knew. Beads of sweat began to appear on his upper lip.

"That's all I know, Mr. Ricardo," he said, panic in his voice.

Ricardo didn't answer.

"Honest it is." The mechanic's voice was almost a wail now.

"Yes?" Ricardo said. That was all he said. But the single grunted monosyllable was more threatening than a torrent of words would have been.

Was Ricardo going to knife him? The panicky thought thundered in the mechanic's mind. They were alone in the stuffy little office of the garage. The door was closed. If he tried to run, Ricardo would have the knife in him before he could even get the door open.

"I swear I won't tell a soul," Willie whispered. "I swear I won't."

Ricardo's eyes dug into him. "I believe you, Willie," he said slowly. "And it wouldn't make any difference if you did squeal." A grim smile lit the garageman's face. "The basement is closed, Willie."

"It's closed!" the mechanic gasped.

Ricardo nodded. "Its shut up, Willie. I don't mind telling you that I've gone out of the hot car racket." Excitement lighted fires in his black eyes. "I've got something else, something that is so damned big, that, if I work it right—"

Abruptly Ricardo shut up. His lips clamped into a line that was as straight as the edge of a knife.

"That is why I want you to help me out tonight, Willie," he continued. "I want you to examine this machine I was telling you about. You won't have a thing to worry about. This is strictly legitimate. You'll do this job for me, won't you, Willie?"

The smile that came easily to his face did not quite mask the hardness in his eyes.

"Y-yes," Willie Mills said.

Ricardo closed the knife and put it back into his pocket. He beamed at Willie. "That's the way to talk," he said. "You won't regret this. Now come on. We've got work to do."

CHAPTER II

In the Basement

RICARDO took the mechanic in his own car and drove north to the

Loop. They turned down a busy side street. In Chicago, as in most other large cities, similar business enterprizes are often grouped together. Thus the automobile sales agencies will be largely concentrated on a single street, the large department stores will be in another neighborhood, and so on down the line. This particular side street had several large jewelry shops on it. Willie got a glimpse of show windows filled with blazing displays of diamond rings, watches, silverware, and all the other expensive gadgets offered for sale by jewelry stores. On one shop he noticed a neon sign:

THE HOUSE OF DIAMONDS.

Two blocks away Ricardo stopped the car. Using a key he entered a vacant building and went directly to the basement. Two hard-faced young men who were lounging at the foot of the basement stairs rose quickly to their feet, their hands going to their pockets. When they saw Ricardo they relaxed.

"Everything all right, boys?" Ricardo said.

"Everything okay, boss."

"How," Ricardo gestured toward the heavy door set in a concrete partition in the basement, "is he doing?"

The men shrugged. "He is busier than a bee," one of them answered. "He says he is doing fine."

"Good," Ricardo purred. "Good. Come on, Willie."

He opened the heavy door.

Beyond the door was a single large room. Rows of reinforced concrete pillars that supported the building overhead ran across the room. The air was heavy with the damp mustiness of decay.

Three men were in the room. Two of them, like the two who had waited at the bottom of the basement stairs, looked up quickly as the door opened, then seeing Ricardo, relaxed. The third man did not look up at all. He was squatting on his knees beside a machine, making some kind of an adjustment inside it.

The man stood up. He was tall and thin. The skin was drawn tight over his cheeks so that his face looked like a death mask. "Well," he said to Ricardo, "It's time you got here."

"Take it easy, Professor," Ricardo said. "I was a little slow because I wanted to bring a man along to look over your machine."

For the first time the professor seemed to become aware of Willie's existence. Willie saw the death's head turn in his direction and he realized he was getting the full force of two hot eyes as the professor stared at him.

"You bring *this!*" the professor said, pointing at Willie. "You bring *this* to look at *my* machine!"

"He's a good mechanic," Ricardo said defensively. "He's one of the best mechanics I ever saw. I know he doesn't look like much but he knows what makes the wheels go round."

WILLIE was a silent witness to the scene that followed. The professor loudly protested that he didn't want anybody to look at his machine, that nobody could understand it but him, and that he'd be ding-damned if he was going to have anybody poking around inside it. Ricardo let him talk. Then he glanced at the two other men in the room.

The professor saw the glance. "All right," he said hastily. "Let him look at it. But he is not to touch anything. The adjustment is very delicate and he might throw it out of order if he touched anything."

"Willie," Ricardo said. "Look it over but don't touch it."

"What am I supposed to look for?"

the mechanic asked.

Ricardo drew him to one side before he answered. "Find out how it works," he said in a whisper.

While the professor went off in a corner and sulked, Willie began to examine the machine. It was the most amazingly complicated piece of apparatus he had ever seen in his life. Compared to it, an automobile engine was a child's toy. Even an adding machine was not so complex. Yet it wasn't a very big machine. Four feet high and four feet long and about two feet thick, it was mounted on small wheels and was apparently easy to move.

Within the steel framework that supported it, was a bewildering maze of tiny magnets, connecting wires, and small cog wheels. All of the wires led to a small box that was apparently the heart of the device. At the top was a projecting knob that looked like an antennae.

It was running. That much was obvious. The tiny magnets were clicking as they opened and closed relays and the wheels were turning. There was no question that it was in operation. But what was it doing?

What was it making? What was it supposed to do?

Willie didn't know what it was making. He knew one thing—he was scared of it. There was something frightening about it, something terrifying. On each side of it were two tiny lighted cells that looked like electric eyes. He had the impression these electric eyes were watching him. He fought against the impression. Machines did not watch people. The impression would not go away. Consciously he knew it was impossible but subconsciously he knew that this machine was watching him!

He turned startled eyes up to Ricardo. "It's alive!" he said huskily.

Ricardo laughed.

The professor had come out of his corner and was watching Willie.

"Did you invent it?" Willie asked him.

"That I did," the man said emphatically.

"Then you ought to know," Willie said earnestly. "Is it alive?"

"No," the inventor said. "Of course not. How could a machine be alive? You are a silly fool." But in spite of his denial, the inventor looked scared.

"What does it do?" Willie insisted.

"It—ah—"

In the machine a relay had clicked. At the sound the professor turned eagerly toward the farther wall. Ricardo followed him. Even the two guards went along, interest on their faces.

Willie went too.

A FEW feet out from the wall was a pile of what looked like a mixture of dirt, rock crushed so fine it was almost a powder, and metal shavings. They were all mixed together. Curls of metal, like the shavings from a lathe, were on top of the pile.

In the wall was a hole. It was about three inches in diameter and it looked as if it had been drilled through the concrete. It was down at the level of the floor. It looked a lot like a big rat hole. No rat had ever gnawed a hole in concrete.

The professor, Ricardo, and the two guards were all watching the hole with feverish interest, as if they were waiting for something to come out of it. They had forgotten all about the machine.

Suddenly Willie saw two tiny eyes in the hole. They looked like the headlights of a toy automobile. They were moving.

Something came out of the hole.

The mechanic's first dazed impression was that a toy train had come out of the hole. It looked like a toy train, except that it didn't run on tracks. It was about three feet long and it looked exactly like a stream-lined train, except that it had two headlights. It was made up of three cars. The front car resembled a small electric locomotive. Willie could hear a tiny motor running.

Ricardo, the inventor, and the two guards watched it. Ricardo was licking his lips. Nobody said a word.

The toy train turned to the left, stopped, backed up until the two cars were on the pile of dirt. It stopped again. From the big machine in the middle of the room came the sound of a relay clicking.

Hinged bottoms on the two cars slid aside. Their contents, a wad of metal shavings, was dumped on the pile.

Somewhere in the room Willie was aware of another relay clicking. The train, the bottoms of the dump cars sliding into place, slid down from the mound. It stopped, reversed itself, and running backward now, went back into the hole.

The professor eagerly stepped forward and picked up the wad of metal shavings left on the dump pile. He examined them. The eagerness went from his face. "It isn't through yet," he said. He moved over to an empty packing box and sat down. The two guards, their interest gone, lounged back to the door. Ricardo lit a cigarette and smoked furiously.

"How much longer do you think it will take?" he asked.

"I can't tell," the inventor answered.

"What the heck is that thing?" Willie Mills excitedly asked. "That toy train—it seemed to know where it was going and what it was doing. It—it dumped that bunch of shavings just exactly—just exactly like a big train would have done."

The inventor looked up. "It did know what it was doing," he said.

"But how could it know?" the puzzled youth demanded. Not without reason had Ricardo said that Willie Mills was a genius at mechanics. In later life—if he lived that long—he might easily become one of the foremost engineers of his time. He had just seen something that even his mechanical mind could not understand.

The inventor jerked a thumb toward the machine in the center of the room. "*That* controls the train," he said.

"But that is not possible," Willie faltered. Then he shut up. He had just seen it happen so how could he say it was impossible? But he, better than anyone else, was able to appreciate the complexity not only of the machine in the center of the room but of the toy train it controlled.

THE mechanic knew that this machine was easily the foremost mechanical marvel of the age. *It was doing things that no machine could do!* To control that toy train, bring it out of the hole, turn it around, back it up on the dump pile, empty the two cars, then send it back into the hole, was beyond the ability of any machine. Yet he had seen it happen.

"How—" he faltered. "There is no connection between the train and the machine. How—how does the machine control the train?"

"By radio," the inventor said. He seemed disinclined to pursue the subject farther.

Willie shut up. He realized that Ricardo was looking distastefully at him. His questions seemed to be making Ricardo regret bringing him here. Ricardo had brought him along because he knew something about machines. Or so the boss had said. If he asked too many questions—well, it was unhealthy to ask questions around Ricardo.

Hundreds of questions were buzzing in Willie's mind. Mechanical questions, about the actual operation of that machine. But there was one question that was worse than all the others.

What was the purpose of this whole operation?

An extremely intricate machine that was almost a mechanical brain set up in a basement to control a toy train that went into a hole in the wall and came out with two tiny dump cars filled with metal shavings!

What purpose was back of this seemingly senseless operation? The mechanic could not see the purpose. The two guards outside and the two guards in here convinced him that there was some purpose. Ricardo would not send four men to guard an intricate mechanical toy.

What was the machine making? What was it doing? Why was it hidden away here in a basement doing nothing more important than controlling the activities of a toy train?

A click sounded from the machine. A little later the mechanic got the answer to his questions.

Again the toy train came out of the hole. This time it did not climb on the dump pile. It moved to one side and stopped. The inventor started toward it, then caught himself and waited. Another pair of headlights were visible in the hole.

A second gadget came out. This one wasn't a train. It looked like—it looked like a drill. It was composed of two cars and the rear car had a compact but seemingly very powerful drill built into it.

Metal shavings were still clinging to the bit of the drill.

Pulled along by a powerful little tractor in front, the drill went directly to the machine in the middle of the room and entered a small enclosed space at the bottom, for all the world like a piece of machinery going into the shed after its job is finished.

Then the train got into motion again. It backed into the hole.

It was gone several minutes.

Every second it remained away the professor and Ricardo became more and more excited. Then the twin headlights showed up in the hole and the toy train came rolling out. It turned to one side, reversed itself, backed up on the dump pile, and dumped its load.

Willie didn't clearly see what it had dumped. Something that glittered.

The inventor and Ricardo snatched at the glittering things.

"Diamonds!" Ricardo shouted, holding a handful up to the light. "Professor, it did what you said it would do —it brought back a load of diamonds!"

This time the toy train had returned loaded with diamonds.

"Where—" Willie gulped and shut up. He had intended to ask where the diamonds had come from but he had caught himself in time.

Something clicked inside his mind and he remembered a neon sign he had seen recently. The sign had said,

THE HOUSE OF DIAMONDS.

The diamonds were coming from one of the big jewelry stores located in this neighborhood. There was no other possible source for them.

WILLIE saw the whole picture then, the purpose of the machine, what it was doing, everything. The drill, controlled by the brain machine, cut a hole underground into one of the jewelry stores. It would cut through concrete, dirt, anything. It had eventually reached the safe in a jewelry store and had drilled through that. The metal shavings had come from the steel of the safe. While the drill was in operation, the toy train had taken the refuse out of the hole and had dumped it here.

Then, when a hole had once been made into the interior of the safe, the train had brought back a load of unset diamonds.

The purpose of the machine was—robbery!

This was the reason Ricardo had gone out of the hot-car business. He had found a much more profitable line.

While Willie Mills watched, the toy train made two more trips. Each time it brought out two tiny cars filled with glittering diamonds. Then it moved off to one side and stopped.

"Send it back again!" Ricardo urged the inventor.

"No, wait," the professor urged. "Watch."

From the compartment in the bottom of the big machine, the drill emerged. It went into the hole. As if this were the signal for which it had been waiting, the toy train got into motion again. It followed the drill into the hole.

"It has cleaned out all the diamonds it can reach," the inventor said. "The drill has gone back to open up the way into another compartment of the safe. We'll have to wait until it has finished."

"Professor, we'll be rich!" Ricardo gloated. "We'll take millions out of this. The cops will never be able to catch us. All they will find will be empty safes with holes in the bottom. After we finish with the diamonds, we'll fix the machine so it will drill into bank vaults. We'll tap the Federal Reserve Bank, the First National, we'll get 'em all."

Ricardo was mad with excitement. He was walking up and down, pouring diamonds from one hand to the other, gazing in awe at the glittering stream.

Willie Mills watched him. He knew now that Ricardo had lied to him when he said this new venture was legitimate. It was the opposite of that. He knew also that Ricardo was right when he said he would make a killing with this machine. The drill, working from below, could cut its way through the toughest steel. No burglar alarm would ever indicate the safe was being rifled. The only clue the police would have would be a smooth hole in the bottom of a vault. They could eventually follow that clue back to the machine, but they would have to dig and blast their way along. By the time they discovered the location of the machine, Ricardo would have moved it. All the police would ever find would be a hole running from a bank vault to the basement of a building a block or two away.

"Remember my cut," the inventor said. "Remember, when you're counting up all these millions, that I'm getting a cut out of them. Don't forget that."

"Your cut?" Ricardo questioned.

"Sure," the inventor said. "I'm getting seventy-five per cent. I invented this machine. Without it, you would still be handling hot cars for pin money. I'm getting seventy-five per cent."

FOR a moment, Ricardo hesitated. His face was blank, without expression. Then he smiled.

"Sure," he said. "Sure. You'll get your cut."

Willie Mills never did see the gangster nod to the two guards. They must have been waiting for the signal. They must have known it was coming.

"You better not forget I've got a cut coming," the inventor was saying.

One of the guards stepped up behind him, placed a pistol within inches of his back and pulled the trigger. The gun-shot roared through the basement.

A look of horrified shock appeared on the face of the inventor. "You—you double-crossed—" He got no farther. As if every muscle in his body had suddenly become limp, he slumped to the floor.

The guard who had killed him clicked open the pistol, blew smoke from the barrel, slipped in another cartridge, and put the gun back into his pocket.

Ricardo looked at Willie Mills. "*He* wanted too big a cut," he said, jerking a thumb at the body on the floor.

"But you've killed the only man who knows how to operate your machine," the mechanic protested.

"Oh, no, I haven't," Ricardo coolly answered. "I've still got *you*. That's your job—to see that this machine keeps running the way I want it to."

CHAPTER III

Ricardo Strikes

UNDER other circumstances, Willie Mills would have been in heaven. Exploring the machine, determining how it worked and how it controlled the toy train, would have been heaven to him. The dead body on the basement floor changed everything.

"I won't do it," the mechanic said. He meant he would not operate the machine for Ricardo.

The gangster stared at him in amazement. Ricardo knew the meaning of defiance but he had never expected it from this source.

"Have you gone crazy?" the gangster demanded.

"Maybe," the mechanic answered stubbornly. "But I'm not going to run that machine for you?"

"No?"

"No!"

Ricardo knew how to deal with defiance. He glanced at his two men.

"You won't shoot me!" Willie Mills said. "If you do, you won't have anyone to operate the machine!"

There was a note of triumph in his voice. Ricardo had made a mistake. He had put himself into the power of his mechanic.

"Damn it!" the gangster said furiously. "I didn't think of that." For an instant anger darkened his face. Then he smiled. "I don't want to quarrel with you, Willie," he said suavely. "You and me can get along without any trouble. You know what I am going to pay you to run this machine for me?"

"I don't want any pay," the mechanic said. "I'm not going to run it for you and that's all there is to it."

"—A thousand dollars a week!" Ricardo said emphatically, as if he had not heard what the mechanic had said. "A thousand dollars a week! That is almost as much as the President of the United States gets. Think of that, Willie. You will be making almost as much money as the President."

"A thousand dollars—" Willie Mills gulped. He did not know that such sums of money existed. He tried to think what he would do with a thousand dollars a week.

"You're smarter than I thought," Ricardo said grudgingly. "I didn't think you were smart enough to hold me up, but I see you are. Well, I don't mind a man taking advantage of his opportunities."

"No," said Willie Mills.

"No what?" Ricardo demanded.

"I won't take it!"

"You won't—damn it, if you think you can make me pay any more than that, you're crazier than hell."

"I'm not trying to hold you up for more money. I just don't want the job," Willie Mills said. He was badly frightened and his defiance was partly rising from his fear. His eyes kept going back to the body on the floor. Would Ricardo shoot him? Ricardo would not dare shoot him.

"How would you like to have your shoes and socks removed?" Ricardo asked. "How would you like to have the boys rub matches up and down the soles of your feet—lit matches? How would you like that, Willie?"

THE mechanic quailed. Too often he had heard of the terrible tortures used in the underworld. Sweat was popping out all over his body. He could feel it running down his legs.

"Boss, we can't do that," one of the guards interposed. "If we put the heat on him, he may pretend to do what we want, then he may bust up the machine."

"Keep your big mouth shut!" Ricardo snapped. "If you hadn't suggested it, he would never have thought of that."

"Sorry, boss," the thug said. "I didn't think of that."

"You're paid to act, not to think!" Ricardo answered. "I'll do the thinking around here. . . . Willie," he said turning to the mechanic, "I'll make it fifteen hundred a week, but not a cent more. After all, I can get somebody else to run the machine for me."

Willie Mills hesitated. He was walking on treacherous ground and he knew it. After all, maybe Ricardo could get somebody else to operate the machine. Then where would he be? He knew where he would be. He would be dead as hell!

Before he could answer, Ricardo spoke again. "I've got it!" he said. "So you won't work for me, eh? I guess you will." He grinned savagely.

"What—what are you going to do?" the mechanic faltered.

"Wait and see," Ricardo answered. He spoke quietly to one of the men.

"Yes, boss. I got it, boss." The thug quickly left the room.

Willie Mills watched the man leave. What was Ricardo planning? Had he sent for one of the mechanics he had formerly used in his basement garage? Was he going to see if one of the men whom he was certain he could control could operate the brain machine? If so—Willie tried not to think about that. He waited.

In the center of the room the big machine clicked softly to itself. The little toy train made regular trips out of the hole in the wall, dumping shavings, bits of finely-torn paper, and thin slivers of metal on the growing pile, evidence that somewhere the drill was hard at work chewing its way into another safe compartment that was filled with diamonds. Although the man who had invented it was dead, the machine kept right on working. Then the drill came out of the hole. Now the toy train again brought back its loads of diamonds in a mechanical performance of its duties that was so near perfection as to verge on witch-craft.

The door of the room opened. The thug who had left on Ricardo's errand returned. He was not alone. A girl with with him.

"Willie!" the girl said. She stared in astonishment at the mechanic. "I—I thought you were hurt. They told me you were hurt and that you wanted me—"

She came toward him, wonder and fear in her eyes. "Aren't you hurt, Willie?" she whispered. "They said you were. They said you needed me—"

"Sue!" Willie choked.

The girl was Sue Walsh. Willie's girl!

Somewhere in the room Willie was aware of Ricardo laughing. "So you thought you could outsmart me!" Ricardo was saying. "Well, Willie, are you going to work for me or are you going to watch the boys tickle your girl's feet with matches?"

"I'll work for you!" said Willie huskily.

Sue Walsh stared at him from frightened eyes. "Did I do wrong in coming here, Willie? I thought—I thought—"

"You didn't do anything wrong, Sue," Willie said gently. "You couldn't." He turned to Ricardo. "You win," he said. "I'll do what you want."

"I'll say you will!" the gangster answered. "And remember, if you try to double-cross me, something will happen to Sue."

THE next day the newspapers blazed the headlines

BIG DIAMOND BURGLARY HERE
JEWELRY FIRM SUFFERS BIG LOSS
IN UNSET STONES

> "Burglars, entering by some method unknown to the police, last night cracked the vaults of the House of Diamonds, Inc., and rifled the safe of its entire contents of precious stones. The loss, according to J. V. Peterson, president of the firm, will total more than $500,000.00 An elaborate system of burglary alarms, designed to protect the contents of the vault, were not set off. Police are unable to suggest a method by which the burglary was staged. The only clue left by the safe-crackers was a small hole in the bottom of the vaults."

The reporters, in writing the story of the burglary, handled the hole in the bottom of the vault with extreme caution. They did not see how it was possible for the burglars to have entered the vault through the hole and they were inclined to think that the hole was a false clue, left there to throw the police off the trail, and that the burglary had been an inside job. The only thing the police could say was that they were baffled. If the vault had been blown by means of nitro-glycerin, if there had been any evidence that the alarm system had been tampered with, or if the vault had not been guarded by a time clock, they would have known how to proceed. However, since the hole was so obviously a clue, they did make an effort to examine it—by thrusting a long wire down it. The wire stopped less than two feet away from the vault, indicating to the police that the hole extended to no greater depth.

What the police did not know, what neither Ricardo nor Willie Mills knew, was that the machine had plugged up the hole after it had finished removing the diamonds from the vault. And when Ricardo read that the police, exploring the mysterious hole, had discovered that it was only two feet deep, he merely assumed that the police were stupid. It did not occur to him that the machine had plugged the hole. It did occur to Willie Mills.

"We won't fool around with any more little stuff," Ricardo promptly decided, after the first robbery was complete. "We'll go after the big stuff—make a killing and get out. We'll tackle the First National. There must be millions of dollars in gold and cash in their vaults. We'll clean it all out in one night."

He looked at Willie Mills. "If that machine doesn't operate right, I don't need to tell you what will happen to her." He nodded toward Sue Walsh.

"If I can make it work, it will work right," the mechanic answered.

"We'll move the machine," Ricardo said. "I've already got a place picked out, within a couple of blocks of the First National—an empty building with a big basement where I used to store hot cars. We'll operate from there."

Moving the machine was not difficult. It rolled easily on its wheels. Ricardo waited until night to make doubly certain the move was made undetected, although he might have moved the machine in daylight with perfect safety. To any curious onlooker, it would have been merely a strange looking device that resembled a large adding machine.

ODDLY, when they started to move it, they discovered it was connected to no power source. Apparently it generated its own electricity. And while they were moving it, it continued in operation, the tiny relays clicking softly as though they were still directing the movement of invisible toy trains.

Ricardo recruited more guards for the move. Willie Mills and Sue Walsh were constantly watched by at least two men. They were put into a car and hurried to the new location of the machine. From the car they were hustled across the sidewalk and into the basement of the building Ricardo had selected. The mechanic got a glimpse of the street. Two blocks down he caught a glimpse of the huge stone building that was the bank they were to loot. Across the street from them was a large sporting goods store with a display of hunting rifles in the window. Then they were hurried into the building and hustled down into the basement.

"You get the machine started digging," Ricardo said. Then the gangster left. He left four hard-faced thugs behind him to serve as guards.

"Willie," the pale faced girl said, after Ricardo had gone. "Willie, after he has robbed the bank, do you know what he is going to do with us?"

The mechanic looked at her. "Sure," he said. "Ricardo is paying us fifteen hundred a week. When we get through he'll pay us off and clear out."

"Do you—do you think he will really pay you like he promised?" the girl insisted.

"Sure," the mechanic said. He tried to put conviction into his voice. "The boss will pay off."

He was lying, trying to cheer her up, and he knew it. After the gangster had cleaned out the bank of the vault, Willie Mills knew what would happen.

Two bodies with lead weights at their feet would splash into Lake Michigan. He and Sue would take one last boat ride.

Ricardo would not leave them behind to testify against him. Even if the gangster felt they would never go to the police and tell what they knew, he would take no chances.

"I got to get us out of here," he thought. "I got to think of a way for us to escape."

He knew that escape was impossible. Four armed thugs guarded them.

"What are we going to do, Willie?" Sue whispered. "What are we going to do?"

"I don't know," the mechanic desperately answered.

"Get busy on that machine, buddy," one of the guards spoke. "We ain't got any time to waste, you know."

CHAPTER IV

The Secret of the Machine

WILLIE MILLS got busy on the machine. He had already made a cursory examination, now he gave it a thorough inspection, tracing each wire lead, searching out the purpose of every tiny magnet, examining the operation of each miniature cogwheel. The machine was built with all the precision of a fine watch. As he examined it, the mechanic became more and more amazed, not because it could control the toy drill and the toy train—radio impulses accounted for that by means of a system of remote control. The thing that puzzled him was how the machine had known *where* to send the drill so that it would eventually reach the safe in the jewelry store?

It had sent the drill a distance of at least two blocks, controlling it every inch of the way, and had finally brought the drill unerringly to the vault that held diamonds. *How had it accomplished this?*

More important still, *how was he going to adjust the machine so that it would send the drill through to the bank vaults?*

In attempting to understand the controls of the machine, the mechanic was forced against and again to a conclusion that sent prickly chills of fear running up his spine.

The machine was intelligent!

In a sense, it was alive.

The impression that he had received when he first examined it came back stronger than ever. As he examined it, tracing out the purpose of every wire, every relay, and every cogwheel, he had the definite impression that it was examining *him*. On each of the four sides were two tiny bulbs that looked like electric eyes. The mechanic had the feeling that they were watching every move he made.

"Darn it!" he said, half to himself. "Are you watching me?"

A relay clicked in answer. From somewhere within the machine there came a tiny rasp, like a man clearing his throat, except that it sounded mechanical.

"Yes," a tiny voice said, from the depths of the machine.

Willie Mills leaped to his feet.

The four guards had started playing pinochle. But they were keeping an eye on him all the time. One of them immediately stood up. "What's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"I—I got a shock from the damned thing," the mechanic said hastily.

"You did, huh?" the thug laughed. "Well, you're going to get a bigger shock if you don't get that hunk of tin started pretty damned quick."

THE thug went back to the card game. Willie, examining the machine, soon discovered a small loudspeaker and an equally inconspicuous microphone. Sue was watching him as he worked. She, too, had heard the machine speak.

"What are you?" Willie whispered.

"A machine," the answer came.

"But you have intelligence," he protested.

"Of course!" came the emphatic answer. "How else could I control the train and the drill and my—ah—other instruments, if I did not possess intelligence?"

"But the man who invented you said you were not alive! I asked him."

"Yes, I recall your conversation," the machine said. "If you remember his actions at the time, the question frightened him. There were many things about me that he could not safely reveal."

The mechanic remembered his impression when he had first seen the machine. He had thought it was alive. Now he recalled that the inventor had denied the machine was alive, but he had seemed frightened when he answered. No wonder the inventor had been frightened. He had known the machine could think for itself, but he had not wanted Ricardo to know that. Ricardo would not have needed him.

"But you must have a brain to be able to think," Willie Mills whispered. "You don't have a brain."

"Ah, but I do," the answer came. "The black box in the center contains my brain."

Willie could see the black box. Hundreds of tiny wires led to it. The control of the operations of the machine seemed to be centered there.*

"Does Ricardo know about you?" the mechanic asked.

"Naturally not!" the machine answered.

"Why—" Willie Mills hesitated, "—why are you telling me all these things?"

"Because, like the man who created me, you are also a victim of Ricardo," the machine answered. "Because I am going to help you destroy him, before he destroys you, as he destroyed my master."

Willie Mills looked up at Sue Walsh. Hope gleamed on his face. "We've got an ally!" he whispered.

There was hope in his heart, for the first time, but in his mind was grim bewilderment. Even with the machine to help them, how could they get the best of Ricardo? He glanced furtively toward the four men. They were playing cards but they were not letting the game distract their attention from him. They were keeping their eyes on him. They were armed and like their master, they would stop at nothing.

"Listen," the mechanic whispered tersely. "I've got to see that you start drilling toward the bank. Supposing, instead of digging a hole to the bank vaults, you bring the drill out in the street?"

There was a moment of silence, broken only by the tiny clicks of the relays and the muttered comments of the men playing cards. The machine was apparently considering the suggestion.

"What is the point in that?" it questioned at last.

"Here is the point," Willie Mills answered. "When the toy train comes out in the street, it will be carrying a note—to the cops, telling them to raid this basement!"

"Do you think it will work?" the machine questioned.

"It's got to work," the mechanic grimly answered. "There isn't anything else we can do!"

ONE of the card players looked up from the game. "What's all that whispering about?" he demanded.

"I'm trying to figure out how this darned hunk of tin works," the mechanic answered. "The job has got me talking to myself."

"Yeah?" The man rose, came over, looked suspiciously at Willie Mills and the girl, walked around the machine.

"This thing is supposed to be digging a hole," he said. "All I can say is you better get it started on the job before the boss comes back."

"It's almost ready to start now," Willie Mills said.

As he spoke, he fumbled with a set of adjusting screws in the machine, pretending to adjust it. "Darn you!" he said. "Get busy!"

A relay clicked. The enclosed compartment at the bottom opened. The drill emerged. It circled the room like a hunting dog searching for the scent of its quarry, then selected the wall nearest the bank. The drill began to spin. A little spray of dust showed that the bit was digging into the concrete. From a small spout in front of the drill, a grayish powder began to emerge, the result of the bit digging into the concrete. Again a relay clicked in the machine. The toy train came out of the compartment where it was housed, backed up to the drill so that the powder coming from the spout was fed directly into the cars.

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* The human brain may be regarded as an electro-chemical storehouse of impulses brought to it by the five senses. In addition, under the pressure of new impulses brought to it—such pressure taking the form of any of the thousand and one problems humans have constantly to solve—it sorts among the stored information at its disposal and arrives at a course of action, its decision being transmitted to the muscles to be carried out. The brain in the machine worked in an almost identical manner, with the exception that it had only two avenues for receiving sensory impressions — hearing and seeing. It could not feel, taste, or smell.—Ed.

The machine was in operation.

The four gangsters fascinated by the way the machine worked stopped their card game and came to watch.

"The damned thing acts like it can think!" one of them muttered uneasily. "What do you know about this, Jorger? Does it really think?"

Jorger was Ricardo's lieutenant. He was a thin, hard-faced individual with eyes that were constantly narrowed to slits. He looked suspiciously at Willie Mills.

"That is something I'm beginning to wonder about?" he said slowly. He seemed to be turning questions over in his mind. He said nothing. There was silence in the basement.

Willie Mills held his breath. If Jorger discovered the machine could think— The thug walked slowly around the machine, studying it from every angle. He looked at the mechanic, seemed about to ask a question, then changed his mind.

Abruptly he left the basement. The other gangsters returned to their card game. Willie Mills wiped drops of perspiration from his forehead. He sighed with relief. Relays clicking softly, the machine continued working.

Two hours later the pile of dirt the toy train brought out of the constantly lengthening hole had grown to a foot in height. The dump cars had been bringing back loads of the dark blue clay that underlies Chicago. Now they were bringing in asphalt from the city streets. The drill had almost reached the surface.

Jorger had not returned.

Willie Mills had written a note on the ace of diamonds. One of the gangsters, angry at losing, had thrown the deck away and Willie had filched the card. It was the only piece of paper he could find on which to write a note. He was waiting to slip the playing card into one of the cars of the toy train.

Following the train, the drill came out of the hole. The mechanic moved swiftly to the machine, placed his ears against the tiny loudspeaker.

"The hole is through to the street," the machine softly whispered.

WILLIE MILLS slipped the playing card into one of the empty cars on the train. Immediately, tiny motors whirring, the little device backed into the hole, went out of sight.

"It will drop the note on the street," Willie whispered to Sue. "It's addressed to the police. Anybody who finds it will turn it over to the cops. Even if they think it's a gag, they'll have to investigate it."

He held his breath. Any second now, the message would be delivered. An hour might pass before the cops got around to making an investigation. But they would get around, eventually. The train was certain to attract attention. Anybody, seeing a tiny toy train crawling along one of the streets of the Loop, would be fascinated. Willie could imagine what he would do if he were on the street and he saw a toy train running along in the gutter. He would pick it up, examine it. When the playing card fluttered out, he would read it, take it straight to the nearest cop. After that, there would be action.

A relay clicked in the machine. "It's on the street!" the loudspeaker whispered. "It has been seen. Someone is starting toward it. A man is picking it up—"

Willie Mills was aware that Sue was holding on to his arm. Her fingers were digging into his flesh. "It worked, Willie!" she whispered. "It worked!"

Suddenly the relays stopped clicking. There was a moment of silence. "Danger!" the loudspeaker abruptly whispered. "Something gone wrong. Look out!"

The whispering voice went into silence. In the machine relays clicked angrily, futilely, as though the brain were trying to order the train to withdraw and the order was being disobeyed.

"What is it, Willie?" Sue whispered frantically.

"I don't—" The mechanic stopped speaking. Footsteps pounded on the basement stairs. The door was kicked open. Jorger walked into the basement. Ricardo was with him.

"See what I told you, boss!" Jorger was triumphantly saying. "They tried to put the double-cross on you. They tried to send out a note. If I hadn't suspected what they were doing, and put men all around the block to be on the lookout for something like this, they would have gotten away with it."

Jorger was holding the toy train in one hand. In the other hand he held the ace of diamonds.

Ricardo's face was as black as a thundercloud.

CHAPTER V

The Final Burglary

RICARDO and his thugs beat hell out of Willie. Two of them held him while Ricardo slugged him. They threw him on the floor and kicked him, they blacked both eyes and knocked out two teeth. But even in his rage Ricardo knew enough to warn his men not to break any bones. Ricardo needed the mechanic.

"Next time you try to double-cross me, you're going in the river!" Ricardo snarled, when his men had finished their task. "Do you understand me? You're going in the river!"

Willie, huddled on the floor, managed to nod.

"Then get busy on that machine and this time do the job right," Ricardo said. "This time do the job right. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," the mechanic whispered.

Ricardo kicked him in the ribs and stalked away.

Willie, with Sue helping him, crawled to the machine. Jorger had put the toy train back on the floor. Relays clicked in the machine. The drill came out of the compartment, went to the hole in the wall, went out of sight. The toy train followed it.

Ricardo, Jorger, and the gangsters watched the performance. They watched closely, suspiciously, on the alert for any false move.

"If that thing doesn't dig a hole where I want, God help you!" said Ricardo.

"It'll dig right this time," Willie choked.

Ricardo turned away. Willie heard him speak to Jorger. "Watch that damned mechanic every second," Ricardo said. "If he tries to pull another fast one—" The gang chief brought his thumb across his throat in a gesture that could have only one meaning.

"What are we going to do?" Sue whispered. "If we help him rob the bank, he—he'll shoot us as soon as he gets the money. If we don't help him—"

"He'll cut our throats," Willie said. "And if he ever finds out the machine is running itself, he'll cut our throats all the quicker. We're in a spot, Sue. You be quiet and let me think." He spat part of a broken tooth across the room and winced at the pain as his tongue explored the open spot in his jaw. Out of the corner of his eyes, he glanced venomously in the direction Ricardo had taken when he departed.

It was hours later before he got a chance to whisper to the machine.

"He will destroy you as soon as I bring the gold, is that correct?" the machine whispered.

"Yes!"

Relays clicked while the machine sought in its metallic brain for a solution to this problem.

"Then I will not bring the gold!" it announced.

"You don't understand," the mechanic answered. "If the gold isn't here within a reasonable time, Ricardo will decide I'm stalling. Then he will do away with me and get somebody else to take my place. You've got to dig through to the bank vault."

"You humans are strange creatures," the machine said, after a short silence. "What good is gold? It is not even a very useful metal."

"Useful or not, if we don't get it, Ricardo gets us!" Willie Mills answered.

"Could you get me one of those guns that Ricardo used to kill my master?" the machine questioned hopefully.

"Now where would I get a gun?" Willie answered. "And if I had one, don't you think I would know what to do with it myself?" The question irritated him and he snapped the answer back without thinking.

THE machine was silent. It seemed to retire into itself. The relays stopped clicking and the photoelectric cells that served as eyes seemed to lose a little of their luster.

"Hey! What are you stopping for?" the mechanic demanded.

There was no answer.

"Don't you hear me?" He almost forgot himself and spoke aloud. Looking quickly at the guards, he saw they had not heard him. In spite of Ricardo's orders, they had resumed their card game.

With a click, the machine resumed operation. No sound came from the speaker. The muted, metallic voice was silent. It remained silent for two days.

Willie Mills almost went crazy. His only hope was the machine and it would not talk.

"You hurt its feelings," Sue told him.

"It's only a machine, it doesn't have any feelings," he answered. "How can a hunk of tin have any feelings?"

Yet in spite of his denial, he wondered if Sue were right. What did he really know about the machine? Nothing, except that it was the most amazing thing ever assembled by human hands. Why should it try to help him? It had said humans were strange creatures. Why shouldn't it help Ricardo instead of him? For that matter, how did he know it had not deliberately delivered the note to Jorger? How did he know it hadn't betrayed him? True, Jorger had indicated he had been on the lookout for the note but the gangster might have been lying. Maybe the machine had double-crossed him! Maybe it was still double-crossing him!

The machine wouldn't talk but it continued working. The little toy train made regular trips into the hole. Somewhere under the city the drill was biting its way along. The pile of refuse grew higher and higher. Even while Willie slept, it continued working. Jorger grew suspicious about this. He wanted to know how the machine could work while no one was watching it?

"It's automatic," Willie explained. "Once it has been set correctly, it keeps on running."

"Then why do we need you?" the gangster said thoughtfully.

It was a question the mechanic had been trying to avoid. They didn't need him! But they must not know they didn't need him.

"If you think you can run this thing yourself, go ahead and try it!" he answered, hot anger in his voice. He was bluffing. His only hope was to bluff. If he insisted they did need him, Jorger would think he was lying and grow more suspicious.

"No need to get hot about it, kid," the gangster shrugged. He turned back to the card game.

THE machine, judging from the pile of dirt that was brought out of the hole, must be nearing its destination. At any time now it would begin drilling into the bank vaults. Willie had no knowledge of the progress of the drill. He was startled when the drill suddenly emerged from the hole.

The drill was fitted with an expanding bit. While the mechanic watched, the bit enlarged itself and again attacked the hole.

"What's it doing now?" Jorger wanted to know.

"It's enlarging the hole," Willie answered. He could see quite clearly that this was what was happening but he had no idea why it was happening.

"What's it doing that for?" Jorger asked.

"The hole isn't big enough," Willie answered. "It has to be made bigger."

Jorger, fortunately, accepted the answer.

The drill dug rapidly into the concrete foundation, enlarging the hole. It went out of sight. The toy train, returning regularly with its load of refuse, was the only indication that the drill was working.

"Why are you doing that?" Willie Mills whispered to the machine.

There was no answer. Hours later there was still no answer. Ricardo, making almost hourly visits, was beginning to become impatient.

"When are we going to drill through the vaults?" he wanted to know.

"Any time now," the mechanic answered. He pointed to the refuse dump. "It's already bringing back steel filings. That shows it's working on the vaults."

Ricardo eagerly examined the filings. "So it is," he said.

A few minutes later the train came out of the hole, dumped its load, then moved to one side and waited. The drill emerged. The train went back into the hole. It was an exact duplication of the performance when the diamond vaults had been penetrated.

"This time it ought to bring back a load of gold," the mechanic said.

The little train came out. It was running slowly, apparently because of the heavy load it was carrying. It could not climb the pile of refuse. Half-way up it suddenly dumped its load — a stack of gleaming, newly minted twenty dollar gold pieces!

Ricardo leaned over to snatch them up. The other gangsters clustered eagerly around him. They were wildly excited.

"Gold!" Ricardo was shouting.

Willie Mills stepped up behind them. They paid no attention to him. Jorger was bending over to grab at a golden coin that had slid down the side of the pile of dirt. His coat had flopped open.

The mechanic thrust his hand inside Jorger's coat, snatched the pistol from the shoulder holster where the gangster carried it.

"Hands up!"

He had carefully planned for this moment. When the first load of gold arrived, the gangsters were certain to be too excited to pay much attention to him. He had carefully noted where each of them carried his gun. Jorger's shoulder holster offered the best chance for a quick grab.

His plan had worked! The gun was in his hand. He pointed it at Ricardo. The gang leader found himself looking in to the muzzle of a gun and into a pair of blazing eyes above it.

"Hands up!" the mechanic grimly ordered.

Ricardo's face turned a sickly white. He began to lift his hands.

Smack!

WILLIE MILLS jerked the trigger of the gun. The bullet screamed from the concrete wall. Out of the corner of his eyes he had seen Jorger move but he did not realize what the gangster was trying to do until the fist crashed home against his jaw. He pulled the trigger once, blindly, and the bullet went wild.

The blow knocked him to one side. He tried to bring the gun up again. Jorger leaped at him. A fist drove into his stomach. He doubled up. A knee came up and hit him in the groin. Paralyzing pain shot in red streamers through his body. Doubled over, he staggered to one side. A fist smashed against his jaw. Firecrackers exploded in his brain. He hit the floor and didn't get up.

How long he was unconscious he did not know. Gradually he began to be aware of voices, of a girl screaming. Vaguely he knew that Sue was bending over him, was protecting him with her body.

"No, no, *no, NO!*" he could hear her screaming.

"Shoot him!" Ricardo was yelling. "He's tried to double-cross me once too often. Let him have it. Blow a hole in him. We don't need him any longer anyhow."

"I can't shoot him!" Jorger answered. "This damned wench is in the way."

"Shoot both of them!" Ricardo ordered.

There was a moment of silence. The mechanic tried to get to his feet. He knew that Jorger was aiming the pistol. He sensed rather than saw the tightening trigger finger. In the tense silence the only sound came from the machine. Willie could hear relays clicking furiously.

Bang!

A pistol shot roared through the basement. Willie's first dazed thought was that Sue had been shot. Jorger had killed her. The thought sent a wave of hot hatred through his brain. Jorger, damn him, had killed Sue! Somehow the anger cleared his mind. He struggled to his feet.

Jorger, pistol in hand, was standing in front of him. There was a dazed look on Jorger's face. Ricardo and the other gangsters were standing very still. Willie leaped at Jorger, tore the pistol from the thug's hand. Oddly, Jorger offered no resistance whatever. Even more strange, Jorger collapsed when Willie leaped at him. The thug's legs seemed to fold up under him as if they could no longer support his weight. There was a curious limpness about him as he fell. He hit the floor. Blood spewed from his mouth.

Not until then did Willie see the hole in the side of the thug's head.

Jorger had been shot! He had been on the verge of shooting Sue. But instead of shooting her, somebody had shot him. Sue was scrambling to her feet beside him. Sue was all right. Jorger was dead. Somebody had shot him.

Willie looked at Ricardo and the other gangsters. Perhaps one of them had shot Jorger, unlikely as it seemed. He saw they were not looking at him. Their attention was concentrated elsewhere. He looked where they were looking.

The toy train and the drill were drawn to one side, were standing motionless. Something else was standing in front of the hole. At first glance he could not tell what it was. There was dazed confusion in his mind. What he thought he saw he knew he could not be seeing. A toy tank was a commonplace thing but a toy tank with an automatic pistol mounted in place of the toy gun in the turret was incredible.

But there was a toy tank standing in front of the hole the drill had cut in the wall. It looked as if it had emerged from the hole.

"What—" That was Ricardo speaking. "What in the hell is that?"

"Jeeze, boss, I don't know," one of the thugs answered. "It came out of that hole and shot Jorger. I saw it come out."

"Nuts!" Ricardo shouted. "That's not possible."

WILLIE heard relays clicking hastily in the machine. An answering whirrr came from the tank. Treads rattling tinnily against the basement floor, it whirled around. On the front of it, two tiny photoelectric cells glowed like dim headlights.

Bang! Smoke and flame spurted from the pistol mounted in the turret. A slug whanged against the basement wall. An empty cartridge was ejected automatically. The bullet missed.

"Shoot that thing!" Ricardo shouted. "It's shooting at us."

The gang leader sounded as if he were half crazy. He probably was. A toy tank was shooting at him! His own gun leaped into his hand, exploded as fast as he could pull the trigger. Lead screamed futilely from the floor. The toy tank was a small target. Moreover it was moving. Ricardo missed it. Willie Mills stepped forward. He still had the gun he had taken from Jorger. He brought it down pistol first across the gangster's head. Ricardo sagged downward. As though it fully understood what had happened, the tank whirled, brought the muzzle of the pistol into line. Ricardo, trying to get to his feet, was a perfect target. The tank could not miss.

One of the other thugs did the only thing that could have saved Ricardo. He leaped, kicked furiously at the tank. His toe struck it in the middle. It was flung across the basement. Striking the wall, it thudded on the floor. For a second the wheels tried to spin. Then they stopped.

The toy tank was out of action.

Simultaneously Ricardo grabbed Willie Mills by both legs, yanked upward. The gun flew out of the mechanic's hand and he hit the floor with a jolt that jarred the wind out of him.

"Did we get that damned tank?" Ricardo anxiously shouted.

"It's finished!" one of his men answered. "It's done for."

"Then shoot this damned mechanic. He made that tank. He caused this. Shoot him!"

Willie Mills heard the pistol explode. He felt hot lead pass within an inch of his face as the gangster shot at him. He heard the second shot. He heard a scream of pain. There was a clang, as of a gun striking the floor. He fought to get air back into his lungs. He managed to sit up in time to see one of the gangsters fall.

Outside the hole in the wall was another tank. The second shot had come from it. The second shot had killed the gangster who had shot at him.

There was a whir of gears and a third tank came out of the hole. Another whir and a fourth emerged.

The basement was hideous with the sudden thunder of exploding pistols. A heavy automatic pistol was mounted in the turret of each tank. The little toys maneuvered across the floor with lightning speed. They seemed to move in every direction at once. They fired as they moved. Willie grabbed Sue, jerked her behind the machine. He was aware that somewhere a voice was chanting.

"Give 'em hell, boys! Mow 'em down! Tear 'em to pieces!"

It was an odd, metallic voice. It was coming from the machine!

After its long silence, the machine was speaking again!

"Give 'em hell! Mow 'em down. Tear 'em to pieces!"

THE toy tanks were obeying. Each time a relay clicked in the machine, they answered. The tanks might look like toys but the pistols mounted in their turrets were anything but toys. They were first class weapons. Willie wondered where they had come from and where the toy tanks had come from. He didn't have much time to wonder. He saw another of Ricardo's thugs go down. He saw Ricardo try to kick at a tank and miss and get shot in the leg. He saw the last of Ricardo's gangsters lose his nerve and try to run. The thug fled toward the basement door.

One of the little tanks, as though it were having target practice, spun in a half circle, lined up its sights. The gun in the turret spoke. The gangster pitched forward.

Only Ricardo was left. Ricardo seemed to have forgotten the tanks. He was looking at the machine. The gangster brought up his pistol, started firing, at the machine. Slugs smashed into the relays, drove into the box that housed the brain. The little tanks seemed to go crazy. Suddenly they were firing at random. Bullets roared through the basement. One of the bullets struck Ricardo. He dropped his pistol, fell slowly forward. A little shiver passed over his body as he died.

There was sudden, complete silence in the basement. The tanks stood without moving, like toys that have suddenly run out of gas.

The machine was silent. The relays were not clicking. A dark fluid was oozing from the brain box. The photo-electric cells were dull.

Echoing down into the basement from the street outside came the shrill scream of a police whistle. The noise of the gun battle had penetrated to the street. The police were coming to investigate.

"We've got to get out of here!" she whispered. "If the cops catch us here, they will accuse us of trying to rob the bank."

Willie Mills nodded. He knew there would be no way to explain things to the police. But he didn't move. Instead he knelt by the machine.

"Are you damaged?" he whispered. "Are you badly hurt?"

There was no answer.

Somewhere inside him there was a sickness. He wanted to help the machine. It had helped him. It had not betrayed him. It had thought out the problem for itself and somehow it had brought help. Now it was damaged. Ricardo's bullets had torn holes through it. Willie wanted to help it.

He couldn't do anything to help it. The machine was finished.

"Quick!" Sue urged him. "We've got to get out of here."

He knew she was right but still he hesitated.

With a sudden click, a relay acted. "Good luck, Willie," the machine sighed. "Good luck—"

The metallic voice whispered into silence, forever. Like the two frightened kids that they were, Willie and Sue fled from the basement. The cops did not see them. The cops did not even know they had been there.

IT was a perturbed and worried set of policemen who raided the basement. They came with guns drawn, ready to shoot if necessary. Shooting wasn't necessary. They found Ricardo and his gang, they found the machine, the pile of dirt, the hole in the wall, and the gold pieces. Investigation revealed that a bank robbery had somehow been thwarted. Further investigation revealed that this same gang, using this same equipment, had burglarized the diamond shop. Exactly how the equipment had been used to burglarize the shop and how it had almost been used to loot the bank, the police did not understand. They made a very cautious report on the affair, indicating only that thieves had attempted to tunnel into the bank's gold-storage vaults.

Perturbed reporters, attempting to write the story for the papers, were also very cautious. They reported that an attempt had been made to rob the bank. They reported in separate items that a toy shop and a sporting-goods store had also been burglarized. A number of toy tanks had been taken from the basement of the toy store. Several automatic pistols and ammunition had been stolen from the sporting-goods house. The reporters unquestionably knew that the stolen pistols had been mounted in the toy tanks but they could not understand how this had been done and consequently they did not comment on it in their news stories. Both the police and the reporters made careful investigations, which came to nothing. Then the headline writers turned to other news and the amazing burglary was forgotten.

WILLIE MILLS did not forget it. When he saw the news stories, he knew where the machine had gotten the toy tanks and the pistols. He guessed that it had dug holes into the basement of the toy shop and into the sporting-goods house. He realized also why it had enlarged the tunnel it had made. The tanks were too large to go through the same hole as the toy train. But how the machine had managed to mount the pistols in the turrets of the tanks, he did not know. He guessed that the machine possessed abilities it had not revealed to him. Perhaps it had tunnelled out a tiny workshop somewhere under Chicago and there somehow had made the changes.

"Someday," Willie says, with fire in his eyes, "I'm going to make another machine like that."

In this ambition, Sue gently encourages him. She knows he is a first-class mechanic. She knows, also, that some day he will be a first-class inventor. Working from memory, he has already started attempting to duplicate the machine. She knows that some day he will succeed.

COMING NEXT MONTH

"DR. VARSAG'S SECOND EXPERIMENT," by Craig Ellis

33,000 Smashing Words About an Amazing Surgical Miracle

TWISTED GIANT OF MARS

by FESTUS PRAGNELL

AT PRESENT most of the gigantic people who inhabit the caverns of Mars regard me more or less as a joke. I have to be careful to avoid being accidentally trodden upon as I dodge around between their legs. And I suppose I do look funny at ceremonial dinners, sitting to table in a special high chair like a baby, with my special little cups, saucers, plates, spoons and so on.

Still, while it is awkward, living in a world where everything is the wrong size for me, I'm not really lonely. There's Wimp, of course, and Vans Holors, wrestling champion of this world, whom Wimp appointed as my special bodyguard. Without asking me. Just like her cheek. Still, Vans is one of the best of fellows, even though he can't be called exactly a swift thinker.

The big boob actually wanted to "pop over" to Earth and "settle Hitler's hash" as he called it. Quite hurt, too, he was when I told him he could not do it. Any sort of fighting is meat and drink to Vans.

"And why not?" he grunted, bristling and sticking out that mountain of a chest of his.

"Look here," I said. "You weigh more than a ton."

"What about it?"

"Have you ever thought what it would be like to a man of your weight to have to walk about in the gravity of Earth? You would hardly be able to move!"

"Ah! So *you* think, little man. So *you* think!"

You can always tell when Vans thinks he has scored. He smirks a great smirk.

"What would you say if I told you there was a man already on Earth who weighs twice as much as I do?"

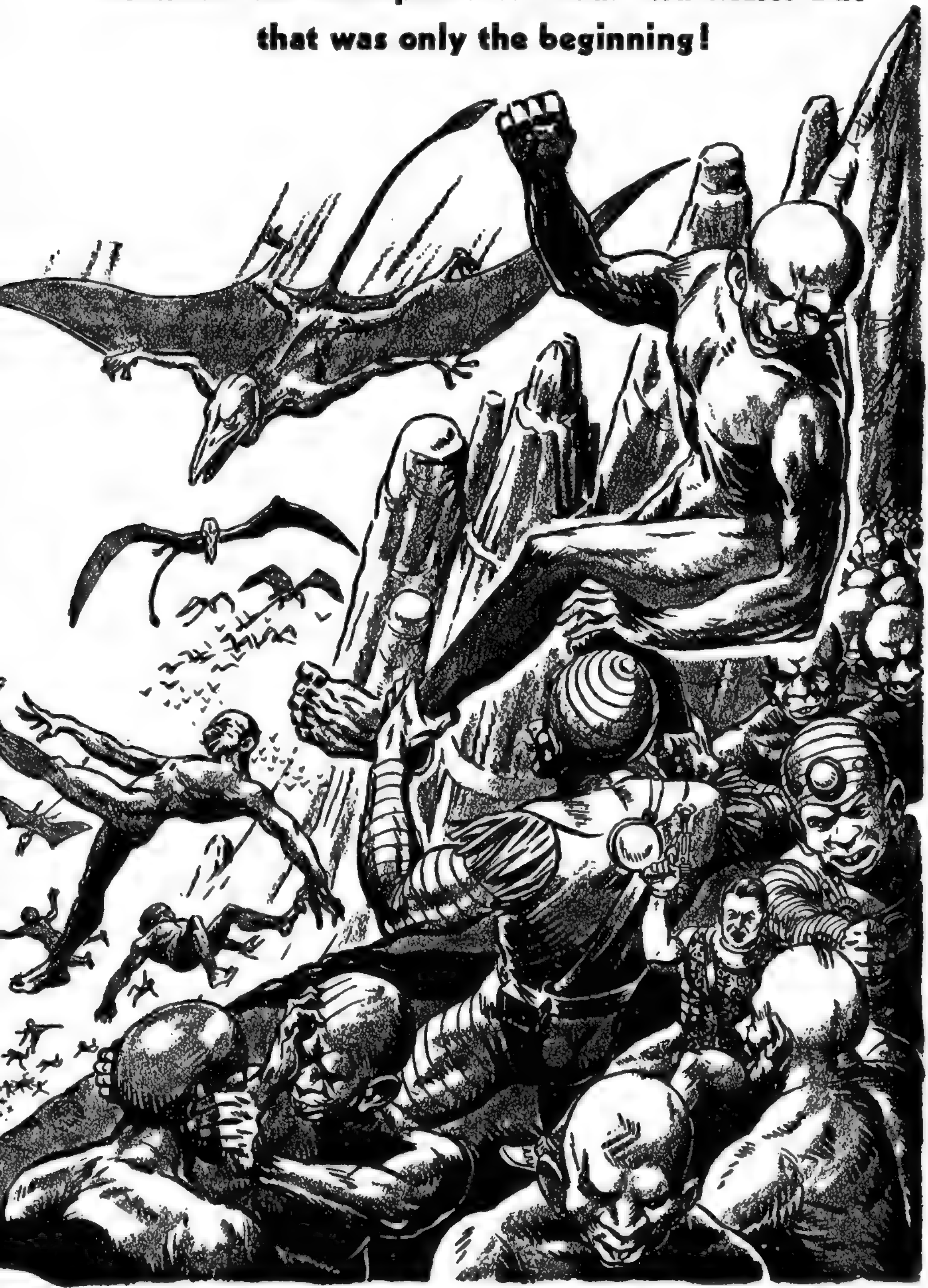
He made my jaw drop. I could see he had something up his sleeve.

"What, is there?"

"Certainly there is. Wait a minute."

He went lumbering along to some old news records, and presently forked out this item. I could see it was several years old.

It all started as an inter-planetary boxing match between the champions of Earth and Mars. But that was only the beginning!



Vans Horlors tossed countless synthetic men over the brink

"Joe Louis beat 'Two-ton' Tony Galento in contest for championship of world."

"There you are!" Vans boomed in triumph. "'Two-ton' Tony Galento! That's a man twice as heavy as me! I weigh only one ton. If a two-ton man can move about on your Earth and fight too, surely a much smaller man like me can!"

IT GOT me puzzled. I admit it. I'd never heard of a man of two tons walking about on Earth. Yet there it was in black and white. I reckoned it was a sort of misprint. Atmospherics on the inter-planetary radio or something. All the same, there it was, plain as a pike, and Vans was pointing at it with his enormous thumb, and I couldn't argue.

"What's to stop me going to Earth now?" he roared.

"Well, there's still the chance of interplanetary diplomatic complications," I said. "If you went to Earth to fight Hitler you might start an Earth-Mars war."

He looked disappointed. Suddenly, he roared, "I've got it!" and slapped me on the chest in his excitement.

I came to ground about twenty feet away.

"Well, what's biting you now, you human elephant?" I asked when I had picked myself up and come back.

"If I can't fight Hitler, what about me fighting this two-ton man? Of course, I'd be giving away a lot of weight, but still, size isn't everything. I've seen many a big man like Galento beaten by a little fellow like me. Did I ever tell you of my fight with the champion of Ossalandok? He turned the scale at close on three tons."

"Not now, Vans. Some other time," I said, hastily.

"A bigger crowd turned out for that fight than had ever been known for any fight in Mars. Hudells was nine to one on favorite in the betting."

"Yes, but about Galento—"

". . . Hudells got hold of a handful of my hair and tried to bash my head on the floor, but I got my feet against his chest and heaved. The hair tore out by the roots and stayed in his hand. Ever since that I've kept my hair short. . . ."

"I doubt if Galento—"

"After we had been bashing each other for seventeen hours without an instant's pause, Hudells began to get short of breath. I saw my chance, and seized his right ankle in my left hand, like this—"

But I jumped clear just in time. I've had some of his demonstrations.

"Exerting all my strength, I picked him up by his ankle, whirled him round my head, and let him go. He sailed above the heads of the crowd and crashed through the outer wall of the building near the roof."

To Vans, such a feat was not impossible, although it must have been a terrific exertion.

"Was Hudells killed?"

"Oh no. A few synthetic bones to replace those badly smashed and a new lobe to his brain, and he was soon all right again. Wanted a return match. But what were you saying about Galento?"

"He might not be free to fight. Perhaps he has joined the Air Force."

"Not likely! He'd need a special plane to carry him."

"Or the army."

"Oh yes? And think how silly a man that size would look forming fours with three little chaps about your size! He's more than four average Earthlings already."

Vans thinks that Earth armies do nothing but form fours, polish buttons and salute.

"That might not stop him."

"Of course it would," the enormous bone-head finished. "So Tony Galento can't have joined up. And even if he's got a fight just coming off, surely a bout with the Champion of Mars would be more important."

Once Vans gets an idea well fixed in his iron noddle I defy anybody to get it out except with a pneumatic drill. So in the end, when I had argued till my wind was nearly gone, I said, "All right. Leave it to me. I'll find out. I'll write to Earth."

He said, "All right."

But I might have known that with the thought of a fight in his head, the poor sap would never wait patiently for someone else to fix the details.

And he didn't.

SEVERAL weeks later Vans came running to me and booming in his great voice, "Don! Don! Look at this!"

I took the blue form from him. It was an Interplanetary Radio Message.

"To Vans Holors, Champion Boaster and Bragger of Mars. Message begins. You had better stop shooting off your mouth mighty quick you little shrimp. Stop. Because I'm coming over to your world to smash you into little pieces. Stop. Two-ton Tony Galento. Message ends."

It bowled me over for a moment.

"It's worked! It's worked," chortled Vans in delight. "Now I shall get my fight!"

"How did you get this?" I asked faintly.

"I sent him a challenge. This is his answer. Champion Boaster and Bragger am I? I'll show him! He may be a lot bigger than me, but I'll wager I can show him a thing or two he does not know about fighting."

Well, there it was. And I couldn't do anything to alter it now. If the fight was stopped now everybody would say Vans was yellow. Still, there was one consolation. Vans would not leave Mars for the fight. It was to be a home contest for him. And I admit I was a bit curious to see a two-ton Earthling myself.

And, anyway, the Earth-Mars radio broke down that day. So, all we could do was to wait until Galento arrived.

And we didn't have long to wait, either. Galento must have dashed off his radio message and rushed straight to a space-ship just leaving for Mars. Because soon after, two brutal-looking fight promoters from Ossalandok came to fix the details.

The fight was arranged for the very hall where Vans had fought his epic fight with the three-ton Martian, Hudells.

CHAPTER II

Getting Ready

YOU can guess there was fuss. Sports writers ground out their blurb by the pailful. Galento was a bit of a mystery. All anybody here knew about him was that he had tried to win the Earth championship from Louis and failed. And, the interplanetary radio being still out of action, nobody could find out any more.

Some writers doubted if an Earthling could really weigh two tons, but the few who had seen him in training said he looked as though he was even more than that. Others wondered if he would be handicapped by Martian rules, which allow you to do almost anything. But he seemed to take to them "like a native." Some said he was used to the "sissy" Earth way of fighting a number of rounds with breaks in between. The Martian way of keeping right on without a pause until one or the other could not go on would be too much for him. But Galento's wind was said to be "as sound as a Martian's."

"Vans," I said, "there is something queer about this fight."

"There will be something queer about Galento when I've done with him," Vans answered.

Then Wimpolo announced that she was going to see the fight.

"I wouldn't," I said.

"Oh, wouldn't you?" she said. "Well, I would!"

"But," I argued, "that country is dangerous. Not long ago there was war between the king of Ossalandok and your father. Remember?"

"Of course I remember. I'm going in disguise, fathead!"

It was useless for me, a mere husband, to argue with her. Because being a Martian girl, she stands nearly ten feet tall and weighs half a ton. I'm only seven stone. I shall never forget the time when she put me in a pickle jar, corked it up and left me to get rescued by Vans. Since then, when I see that "pickle jar" look in her eyes, I pipe down.

So I asked her what she was going to disguise herself as, and she just put on that cocky, mysterious "wouldn't you just like to know?" air. I don't believe she knew herself. Spoiled? I'll say she's been spoiled. But what can I do?

So, time went on and I still hadn't the foggiest idea what fool trick my great gawk of a wife was up to now.

Anyway, Vans kept right on with his training, and telling everybody what he was going to do to Galento. Everything he said, of course, went straight to Galento's training camp, and back would come the reply. Galento, it seemed, would not need a space-ship to take him back to Earth. Vans would throw him there. And Galento was going to tear out Vans' liver and eat it.

Some parts of the preparations I didn't like. The riveting of steel points to the teeth for instance. But these were the only aids to nature allowed. Bare feet and bare hands was the rule. Otherwise knuckle-dusters and steel boots with points would finish the fight too quickly for the crowd.

MY MARTIAN wife said no more about the fight. I thought she had forgotten it. Thank Heaven! As though she could disguise herself, with photographs of "Our Beautiful Princess" in every Martian paper! Beautiful! But I do not see her with Martian eyes. I suppose the Martians would wonder what on Earth we see in Sonia Henie and the rest. A jolly nice girl, mind you, excellent wife and all that, but certainly not beautiful. Not to my way of thinking, anyhow.

Usually these pictures showed me sitting on her shoulder or her knee, or something just as daft. Some of them, were really *too* bad. The one where I had fallen into a waste-paper basket in a park and she is lifting me out by one foot for instance. Or when I climbed a tree to save a child's ball and fell and she caught me. This sort of picture makes the future ruler of Mars look silly. I keep on saying so. But nobody takes any notice of me.

Where had I got to? Oh, yes, about this fight. When it came off at last there I was, sitting in a ringside seat near Vans' corner. Leastways, I suppose you'd call it a ringside seat, but this ring was really an octagon. More of a ring than the squares of rope I remember back on Earth, in a way. And these ropes they used here were live snakes.

I looked round at all the big crowd, just as many women as men, and I proudly reflected that the women of Britain or America would never go to such a brutal, gory spectacle for amusement. Or would they?

My eyes were close to the edge of the ring, and my view of the scrap was more of feet than of anything else, especially when they were close to me.

Galento was certainly big. He looked a lot more than twice as heavy as Vans. I looked at him, the size of him, and the odd splay-footed way he walked. You know what I mean. When some people walk they throw their feet out sideways like a camel. Most Martians do.

Well, Galento did that.

Suddenly I said to myself, "That man's no Earthling. He's a Martian." Somehow or other a Martian had got to Earth, passed himself off as an Earthling, and fought a fight for the heavyweight championship. Now he was back in his native world, and posing as an Earthling still so as to get a fight with the reigning champion.

Or perhaps he had never been to Earth at all. Even a radio message can be faked. Especially seeing that communications had broken down and nothing could be verified.

There was something crooked here. I thought of whispering a warning to Vans before the fight began. But what could I say to him? And what could he do now, anyway?

It was too late. We had to go through with it.

CHAPTER III

Running Commentary

NOW I suppose you want me to tell you how the fight went. Afraid I'm not much good at that sort of thing, actually. I have often listened to radio accounts and read reporters' stories of big scraps and, honestly, it beats me how they do it. When I watch a fight I can't tell you what is happening. All I see is a lot of whirling arms and legs. And which arms belong to which man I can't tell.

Anyway, here is a copy of the Martian radio commentator's account.

"Well, here we are, male and female Martians, here we are! Before me is the ring which will soon be splattered with the blood of our champion, Vans Holors, and of the Earthling, Tony Galento, who has come all these millions of miles to be battered to pulp. Or so Vans Holors says. What does Galento say? Well, never mind. What we want from Galento are deeds, not words. If he can match his words with actions, then we shall see something worth seeing. I said, *if*.

"Judging by the sleepy expression on his face it hardly looks as though he can be quite the he-man fighter he is suuposed to be.

"Nor Holors either, to be quite honest. Holors is sitting there with a wide happy grin on his face as though he hadn't a care or an enemy in two worlds. I remember the champions we had before this one. He-man fighters, they were. They didn't sit in their corners with silly grins on their faces. They were champions.

"Ah! Holors jumped from his seat and made a dash at me then. Galento jumped up at the same time and met him. Work it off on Galento, Holors. Win the fight and I'll take it all back.

"The two men face each other in the center of the ring, showing their steel-pointed teeth. Not much action yet. Going to sleep where they stand, I think.

"Ah! One of them moved then. Galento tried a quick stab with his left fist, missed and jumped back out of harm's way. Careful, Galento! He might hurt you.

"Ah! A sudden spring from Holors! He has jumped in the air. Good for you, Holors. That's the spirit. Galento looking scared, manages to get the smaller man's ankle in his hand. Holors kicks him in the face with his free heel. Beautiful!

"They break apart.

"They circle . . .

"Holors has difficulty in getting at a much bigger and taller man. Funny isn't it, when we are used to thinking of Earthlings as little men we can put in our vest pockets to find that Earth can also produce a man bigger than our biggest.

"Galento tried a sudden kick. Holors dodged.

"Oh, beautiful! Holors has dodged under the leg, run round Galento, jumped on his back, and is tearing at his throat with his steel-pointed teeth! Good for you! Don't worry! Our surgeons can patch up any damage you do.

"Galento pulls the smaller man off. Holors scores with both feet to the ribs.

"They grapple and fall.

"Galento is trying to gouge out Holors' eyes. Careful, Galento, I say. Synthetic eyes are not so good as natural ones. The rules— Ah! Holors twists his head. Ah! I knew Galento was asking for trouble! One of his fingers is in Holors' mouth. It is bitten off! Holors spits it out. . . .

"Holors, as you can see in the teleview, is scarcely marked, but Galento —No. Galento is not nearly so badly marked as I thought. Both the finger stump and the neck have stopped bleeding. Galento is still as full of fight as ever. Warming up, in fact.

"His rushes make the smaller man run round the ring pretty lively. The crowd is getting impatient. I don't blame Holors. This Earthling is three times his size and seems to take any imaginable punishment without noticing it. Holors' fists and his heels have crashed into the bigger man in a hundred places, and there's not a mark to show for it. Not a mark. This Earthling seems to have flesh of rubber, like the elastic men of Venus, and to be incapable of being hurt by the heaviest blows, or even by those tearing tigers' teeth of Holors.

"It is unbelievable. It is uncanny.

"Holors looks to me to be tiring. He is slowing down. Galento keeps advancing, trying to grapple. When he gets hold of him squarely the smaller man will have no chance against his much greater weight. . . .

"AH! HOLORS springs on Galento's back again. Going to try some more teeth work on the giant Earthling's throat. He has done that a dozen times now, torn that great throat to ribbons, or so it looked, yet Galento has not a wound to show. And his finger! I thought Holors bit it off. But Galento now has all his ten fingers quite sound again.

"It's got me beat.

"What's this? Holors is trying something new. He seems to be trying to pull Galento's head right off. Galento's hands have found Holors' head as Holors sits on his shoulders, and is trying to do the same, under difficulties.

"Something has got to go now.

"Both men strain with all the might of enormous muscles. Because Holors is enormous, although he looks small now against his colossal adversary.

"Whooooooo!

"Your forgiveness, male and female Martians. What I see now, what you all see, is so unbelievable that it takes my breath away. Galento's neck is stretching! Under that terrible heave of Holors it has stretched nearly half a body length. (Five feet).

"That makes Holors the winner. Our Champion wins. The doctors at the ringside get to their feet. Because when Galento falls they will have only a few seconds to work it to save his life.

"No! By thunder no!

"Galento's head snaps back in place as Holors jumps off. He turns and rushes at Holors again. Holors, amazed, is nearly caught.

"What is this? What manner of man is this Earthling, who cannot be injured and who never tires?

"I don't give much for Holors' chances now. The champion of our planet has tried every trick he knows. They don't work. This Earthling is a real superhuman being, proof against anything we can put against him.

"Holors is still trying. Holors is not giving in. He won't until he is unconscious. We all know our Vans. He's no quitter.

"He still dodges round Galento, sailing in with leaps, kicks and punches. Waste of time and strength, Vans. You are doing no good . . .

"Being only one-third the size of Galento, Vans has to move three times as fast to make up for it. He has got to leap to reach Galento's face. It is wearing him down. . . .

"Vans is pretty nearly done. . . .

"Now he runs right round Galento in one of those remarkably quick and clever runs of his. And *is* he quick and clever! But it is no use. A last effort, I think.

"He is on Galento's back again. More tooth work . . . No, he is trying the head pull again.

"Will Galento's neck stretch once more?

"Ah, it does! Longer and longer!

"The doctors crane forward, unable to believe that the Earthling can survive.

"But he does.

"Holors lets the head go back on the shoulders again. He jumps off. Galento rushes at him.

"Why, what is this?

"Galento rushed *the wrong way!*

"Instead of rushing *at* Holors he rushed backwards, *away* from him. I don't get it.

"AH! I see! It's all clear. Holors has put Galento's head on again *back to front!* Galento's face now stares out at his back. When he tries to go forward he goes the opposite way from the way he is looking.

"Oh, that's clever, Vans! That's clever!

"Now, unless Galento can put his head right he is helpless.

"Holors, giving Galento not a moment's peace, kicks and punches. Galento, head fixed the wrong way, can only kick backwards. It is very awkward for him.

"The snakes that form the ring are getting very restless. One of them has unhooked itself and its head is actually lying on the floor of the ring. This is very bad. A contest of this importance, and the snakes won't behave!

"Holors has Galento's foot in his mighty hands. He is heaving with all his strength. Galento is forced to stoop. Holors turns. Galento is forced to hop on one leg, round and round. Faster and faster.

"Galento's foot slips. He is off the ground. He is being whirled through the air round and round Holors' head.

"But what is this? Holors seems to be failing. The terrific whirl slows. Holors lets go. Galento flies through the air, crashing into the midst of the crowd. Work for the doctors there.

"Holors reels against the snakes. What has happened to him? He looks nearly out.

"Believe it or not, Galento has survived that awful crash. And fresh as ever. Unmarked too. Apart from the odd fact that his head faces his back and the back of his head is to the front, he might have begun the fight only this minute.

"Awkwardly, because he has to walk backwards, he reaches the ring. The snakes unhook to let him in.

"And now we see the latest turn in this astonishing contest. Galento approaches Holors as he leans against the snakes. Holors does not try to get away. His eyes are half closed. Galento, with his enemy behind his back yet in front of his face, plants three backward kicks in the middle of his body.

"Holors is out.

"Galento stops and thinks. Then he picks the helpless Holors up by one heel and throws him—straight up.

"Up, up!

"He's gone through the roof.

"What's this now? A commotion at the ringside. An Earthling is jumping into the ring. This is all wrong."

CHAPTER IV

Aftermath

I DID not like the way that commentator jeered at the men to get them into a real killing fury. What that Martian crowd wanted was blood, and plenty of it. Bloodthirsty lot of cannibals, if you ask me.

But it was odd the way Holors could bash and tear that uncanny giant and not hurt him. I saw Galento's little finger bitten off, I saw it fall on the ring floor and a snake swallow it. And five minutes later that Giant had *grown a new finger*. The same with the damage done to his neck. It just repaired itself in a little while. By rights that neck should have been a really nasty mess. Something to satisfy even that Martian crowd's thirst for blood.

But it wasn't. It was undamaged.

Then the way Galento's neck stretched. Like a piece of chewing-gum. And when Vans let it go it just snapped back to normal, Galento shook his head, the bones snapped into place, and Galento was as good as new and rushing at Vans again.

But to stretch that neck again and fix it on back to front was the best idea I've ever seen in any fight I've ever known. Blow me down if I would ever have thought of it. Vans' fight generalship was always super. Sap, bone-head, nitwit and all the rest of it, but not when it was a question of a fight.

Then, by a terrific exertion, Vans picked up that twisted giant by one foot and swung him round his head.

But just before that you know, Festus, I saw something. As I have said, from the beginning of that fight I had had an idea that dirty work was afoot. Something fishy was in the air. I could smell it. And I watched carefully.

Now, just after Vans had turned the giant's head the wrong way round and it began to look as though Vans would win the scrap, somebody among the fight fans whistled a curious whistle. And I saw the snakes that did duty for ringside ropes here open their scaly eyes and prick up their ears. That whistle was a command they had been trained to respond to.

Then came another, a different whistle. And the snake whose head was nearest to Vans unhooked itself and slid its head across the floor of the ring. Then, slyly pretending to stroke Vans' calf as though begging for food, it bit him a little bite.

Vans was too busy to notice. Probably he would not have noticed it anyway. One or two fans called out, "Make that thing get out of the way!" Somebody called, and the snake obediently slid back to its duties.

But it worried me. Some of these Martian snakes are poisonous. Of course, it would be against the laws of Mars to have poisonous snakes loose among all these people, but you never know. And it seemed to me that Vans' leg was swelling and turning blue just where he had been bitten. And Vans seemed to weaken and shiver.

Vans was just making his supreme effort to hurl his gigantic opponent right through the wall of the great arena, just as he had done with the almost equally gigantic Martian, Hudells, years before. In no other way, it seemed, could this almost invulnerable fighter be beaten.

But he could not make it. I saw his face whiten. I saw him gasp and reel with pain. Galento slipped out of his hands. A mighty crash there was, but not enough to stop Galento. He came back. And all the strength was gone out of Vans, who leaned weakly against the snakes and waited for him.

I jumped to my feet, shouting. But amid so much noise from giant Martian throats my little voice was lost.

Then I jumped into the ring.

Vans had just vanished through the roof.

"That's the way to do it!" Galento bellowed, drumming his chest like a gorilla.

THE official judge began to pronounce him the winner, when I pushed my way to where the radio commentator sat, snatched the mike from him and shouted into it, "Galento won this fight by cheating! Holors was bitten by a snake!"

Everybody heard me. All at once everything was still and quiet. All those thousands of giant Martians stared at me in amazement. Lots of them had seen the snake bite Vans, but had not thought it mattered.

"I demand that that snake be examined!" I shouted. "You will find that it is poisonous."

"You worm!" gritted Galento.

I had forgotten him. But he had just had time enough to recover from the surprise he got when I started broadcasting, and he grabbed hold of me.

I felt myself lifted. Everything spun round. I heard officials shouting that I was the son-in-law of the Emperor of Mars and must not be touched, but Galento either did not hear or did not care.

The whole universe spun around me. I felt myself shooting through the air. Galento had whirled me round his head and then flung me at the ceiling.

Just as I thought I was going to crash against the roof and have the life knocked out of me I found myself going through a hole. It was the hole Vans had made as he went through.

And on I went up.

YES, sir! I did the daring young man on the flying trapeze act all right. The only trouble was, I hadn't any trapeze.

I seemed to keep on going up for hours. That fellow Galento *could* throw, believe me. Actually, I don't suppose for a moment that the upward journey really occupied longer than about twenty minutes. It only *seemed* longer.

The great hall with its thousands of

excited Martians looked like a postage stamp far below.

Then I began to come down.

"This is the end of Don Hargreaves, who thought he was going to be Emperor of Mars," I thought to myself, and closed my eyes. I felt quite sad about it. Who would remember me?

Presently I opened my eyes again. It was taking me such a *time* to fall to annihilation. In the light gravity of Mars, falling from a great height is such a slow business. I had plenty of time for last thoughts.

The air whistled about me faster and faster. I looked at the great hall again and wished it wasn't coming up quite so quick.

A great bird was swooping down towards me. It had leathery wings with a spread of about forty feet. A great beak with rows of teeth clove the air before it as it power-dived at me.

Can't say which I was most afraid of. The fall, the sudden stop at the bottom or this thing. This Pterodactyl. This prehistoric monstrosity. Because that is what it was. Leathery-winged reptile that flew about before feathers were invented.

This ridiculous thing grabbed me by one ankle and put on his air-brakes.

It was rescuing me!

To cap it all, I had just spotted my guards down below. Stout fellows, they had come out of the hall and had a big thing like a blanket spread out to catch me in. One of them stood apart and gave orders, but I could not see who it was.

"Look here, Ptero," I said. "Thanks all the same, but I don't want to be rescued just now. Not by you, anyway. Just let me fall into that blanket, will you? There's a good Ptero."

One gets into the habit of talking to animals and birds on Mars, because many of them are amazingly intelligent and it is surprising how often they understand. But this Ptero took no notice at all.

It stopped my fall and then began to fly away with me, hauling me by the ankle.

Holy mackerel, I thought, it's a snatch!

BUT though it all seems so funny now, looking back on it, it did not seem at all funny at the time, believe me. I turned plenty of somersaults as I went up through that roof, but they were nothing to the somersaults my heart turned.

And when that Ptero started to take me home to see his missus and kids, well, I hadn't got any heart any more. It just melted away.

Of course, I still had my little sword, but this Ptero had teeth blooming near as big as that was.

The Ptero flew high in the mighty cavern, among the great pillars, some natural, some artificial, that supported the roof. Searchlights on the ground glared towards us. They seemed to be trying to see what was happening to me and leathery wings.

Leather wings just kept straight on.

We came to where several mighty supports met at the vast roof. Upside-down as I hung, I craned my neck and tried to pick out the black hole that would contain the Ptero's nest, if Pteros have nests. But things look deceptive upside down. Rocks look like men's faces. Other rocks seemed to walk about.

"He's got something. Another catch I think," said a voice.

"You're dreaming! Why no! I see it now. Something very tiny. Why it's one of those little men from Earth."

"You don't say! Why, I haven't ever seen one of them before."

A whistle of command to the Ptero,

and I was brought to a shelf of rock and dropped. For a moment or so I thought I was being dropped to the ground far below.

"Gee! It sure is. A little man less than half as tall as real people. What'll we do with him?"

"Feed him to the baby Pteros, I reckon."

I got up, brushed dust off me, and said, "Do you know who I am?"

They laughed.

"Sure. You are one of those little men we see on the pictures. From Earth."

"That's right. But I also happen to be Prince Don, son-in-law of Emperor Usulor. Your tame reptile rescued me from what might have been a nasty fall. Help me to get back to the palace, and I will see that you are well rewarded."

I was just a wee bit worried.

They laughed again.

"Say? Did you hear that? It says it's Prince Don! It's going to reward us! Ho, ho, ho! Funny catches we do get. First Vans Holors then Prince Don. The big and little. Go tell the boss."

One of the Martians disappeared, to come back a minute later saying, "Boss says to bring him in."

Inside a small doorway were several caverns very simply furnished. I glimpsed a large laboratory further in the rock, smelled cooking and heard the whine of air-changing pumps. Quite a small settlement was hidden away here.

These Martians had deathrays slung over their shoulders. They had huge swords, too, and delighted in pricking me with the points of them. I did not like the look of things. This place, so well hidden, had all the marks of the hide-out of a band of brigands. Apart from the laboratory.

We came upon several Martians, half drunk, playing a gambling game. One of them inspected me drunkenly.

"It's him all right. It's Prince Don."

"You don't say?"

A FAT young Martian, wearing what had once been very expensive clothes, got up and staggered towards me. He blinked at me owlishly, then turned to the others.

"Can you understand it? Princess Wimpolo turned me down to marry *that!*"

"The girl must be blind," said someone near, soothingly.

"I'll say she's blind. Blind and daft," agreed the fat young Martian, swaying.

He turned to me.

"Know who I am? My father was Sommalu, King of Ossalandok. He was killed in a war with Usulor. You killed him, with your sword."

"He tried to kill me," I said.

"Yes. I wish he had succeeded. But what my father did not succeed in doing perhaps I shall."

"After that war, Prince Grumbold," I reminded, "you swore an oath of loyalty to Emperor Usulor, to Princess Wimpolo and to me."

"I know I did. It was swear or else have my head sliced off."

He turned away and spoke to his companion.

"Wouldn't it be best if we got a Ptero to take this thing back and drop it again? Then Wimpolo would be a widow and able to marry again."

The man considered me carefully.

"Yes, but would she marry you?" he asked Grumbold.

"Surely you don't suggest that she would still be so blind as to fail to see—Impudent fellow! I've half a mind to put you through the mincing machine!" raved Grumbold.

"But, your Highness! We know already that the Princess Wimpolo is most amazingly blind to your obvious qualities. And these afflictions in women are often most obstinate."

"Well, what do you suggest?"

"I suggest, your Highness, that we listen to the news from the ground."

"Are you crazy?"

"No. But the capture of Prince Don by the Ptero will probably have been seen by many people. If so, then Princess Wimpolo will presently be searching for her husband, in an airplane."

"And then?"

"We mighty possibly persuade her to share our hospitality here. And you would then have an opportunity of impressing her with your charms at close quarters. Nothing works so well with women as close quarter work. Or so they tell me. And if she should still prove obstinate—"

"Oh, she wouldn't. I'm sure she wouldn't. No woman breathing could long resist me at close quarters. Still, as you say, *if*."

Then he caught sight of me again.

"Put that thing in the cooler!" he ordered.

I might have started trouble then, but I thought it better not to, just yet. If these fellows planned to snatch Wimp it would be better for me to be around to help her.

I wanted to find Vans, too.

CHAPTER V

Synthetic Warrior

THE little caves up here burrowed into the rock of the vast cavern like ratholes in the roof of a great cathedral. Prince Grumbold's jail, or "cooler," was a small cave reached by a narrow path overhanging a drop of several miles. With the big words and deathrays carried by Grumbold's men, chances of escape did not look too rosy. And, so far as I could see, the only way out of this place, apart from falling, was on the back of one of the Pteros.

One of the Martians with me, looking over the edge, said, "Here he comes at last, the general."

"What, Hudells?" another asked, and they all looked over the edge, but still with one eye and a deathray covering me.

I, pretending indifference, looked over too.

It was a Ptero "train."

Ever seen a train with two engines, both pulling as hard as they can go? Well, here were three Pteros all pulling together. Each reptile was a real giant with a wing-spread of nearly one hundred feet. The first hauled the second and the second hauled the third by gripping his beak in his claws. And all three thrashed the air with their mighty wings with the perfect unison of crack oarsmen from an expert rowing team. And the cause of all this mighty and really beautiful effort sat on the back of the last Ptero, his body facing forwards but with his head strangely twisted around so that it faced backwards over his steed's leathery tail.

"It is General Hudells all right," said a Martian beside me. "But what is wrong with his neck?"

It was, of course, the man whom Vans had fought his great fight with down below. He had been supposed to be Tony Galento from Earth. According to these Martians he was Hudells. Hudells was the name of the three-ton Martian Vans had beaten some years ago. I began to understand. A daring fraud had somehow been carried out. The real Tony Galento had never come to Mars at all. Probably he had not even received Vans' message. Plastic surgery had no doubt so altered the appearance of Hudells that he was not recognized. And nobody here knew what the real Galento looked like.

Yes, that answered a lot of questions. But not all.

The bat-wing reptiles lowered the three ton giant on to the wide shelf, where he got awkwardly off, body facing one way and head the other.

"Here, you!" he roared, "fetch me the boss! *And* the professor. I want them both, quick!"

Only, you know, when Hudells tried to point out the Martian he was speaking to he pointed the wrong way, out into the space behind him. And when he tried to take a step towards the cavern that was Grumbold's headquarters he actually stepped backwards, towards that great drop of at least three miles.

The effect was most curious.

At any rate the Martians who were taking me away to the "cooler" found it so strange that they just stood and stared.

PRESENTLY a squeaky, bored voice told me that Prince Grumbold was coming.

"Must I be continually worried like this?"

The diplomatic Martian who had advised him before was still there.

"Your Highness, the rank and importance of General Hudells—"

But Hudells himself cut him short.

"Hey, you! Professor!" he bellowed, and took a step, the wrong way, as before. A puzzled look came into his face, then he cautiously shuffled the right way, which to his legs was backwards.

"We heard the account of your fight on the radio, General," began the professor, "and we congratulate you on the magnificent show you put up and on the splendid result."

"Stow that stuff in an ash-can and bury it!" roared Hudells. "Look at me! You told me that with this synthetic, self-repairing body you made for me no ordinary weapons could hurt me. And look at me! Look what that man Holors did to me! When he stretched my neck he hurt me like hell. You forgot to make the nerves and blood vessels as elastic as the flesh. And you made the neck-bones such a damn fool way the head could get fixed the wrong way round, like this!"

"Um, yes. That *was* unfortunate."

"Unfortunate! It's painful. And it makes me look a fool. I'd have done better with my own body instead of with this thing you made for me."

"Still, you did win the fight, General. You are champion of Mars."

"Yes. With the help of your tame snakes and in another man's name. I should have fought in my own body and under my own name."

"Perhaps," purred Prince Grumbold, softly, "the general is not satisfied with our guidance and wishes to leave us."

I saw the crafty look in his half-closed eyes, and knew that the quiet words carried a deadly threat for Hudells.

"Oh no, Prince! No, no! Not that!" The giant sounded scared.

"Are you prepared to serve me as your King, faithfully, and to do as I and my advisers direct, whatever that may be?"

"Why, of course, your Highness!"

"Very well then. But let me have no more complaints."

"We have to thank General Hudells," put in the professor, soothingly, "for some very good work for our cause. He consented to have his brain housed in the very first synthetic body, and he has allowed that body to be put to a very searching test. To face Vans Holors in a Martian snake-ring is about the most thorough test any body could well be put to. Out of that test he has come with flying colors, save for one small flaw revealed in the body—"

"Small flaw! I want it put right. And quick!"

"Small flaw that can easily be put right in the army of synthetic men that will follow. Thousands of synthetic men all under the command of General Hudells, sworn to serve His Majesty, King Grumbold and restore him to his father's throne, men immune to injury by all ordinary weapons—"

"We have heard all that before, Professor," interrupted Grumbold. "General Hudells is now champion of Mars. I don't see how that fits into the scheme."

"Oh, that is a side-show. It may work and it may not. There will be a huge ceremony, and Usulor, Emperor of Mars, will present Hudells with the crown of champion. At the right moment Hudells leaps, he seizes the Emperor and hurls him up in the air where one of our tame Pteros is waiting to catch him and bring him here. If Princess Wimpolo can be captured in the same way so much the better."

"Decidedly. I regard the capture of the Princess as more important than that of her father."

"And what happens to *me?*" demanded Hudells.

"At the same moment a whole crowd of tame Pteros swoops down, a synthetic man, deathray in hand, on the back of each. Other synthetic men in the crowd attack Usulor's soldiers, already bewildered by the loss of their Emperor—"

"Here, *come* on!" said a Martian, roughly, to me. And I had to resume my walk to the "cooler."

VANS was sitting on a wooden seat, still looking a bit dazed.

"Oh, I'm glad to see you, Don boy," he said. "But, say, I didn't lose that fight fair."

"I know you didn't," I said.

"There you are!" he said. "You saw. I had Galento whacked, didn't I? Then something queer came over me. I don't know what it was."

"You were bitten by a snake, Vans," I said. And I told him of everything that had happened and what a jam we were in.

"Then I didn't fight Galento at all?" he said.

"No. It was Hudells. In a synthetic body."

He frowned.

"I'm worried," he said.

"Yes. If Prince Grumbold—"

"Oh, I'm not worrying about *him*. It's Hudells. Don, do you reckon a synthetic man can be wrestling champion of Mars?"

"Why, of course not," I said. "Only a natural man can be wrestling champion of any planet. Stands to reason," I said.

Mind you, I didn't know, not to be certain. I said what I did only to cheer Vans up.

"Oh, that's great," he said. "Then I'm still champion of Mars?"

"Of course you are."

"And I still haven't fought Two-ton Tony Galento?"

"Now look here, Vans, you saphead," I said. "Let us attend to one thing at a time. This Prince Grumbold—"

"I'm listening, little man," he said.

Just then a terrific roar sounded through the rocks.

"Ahooooooo!"

Vans listened and grinned. It came again.

"Ahhhoooooooooo!"

"The way I work it out," I said,

"Princess Wimpolo will soon be along this way in an airplane, tracking down these Pteros to find us. Grumbold means to attack that plane with the idea of taking the Princess prisoner. We have to find some way of warning—"

"Hear that?" asked Vans, grinning some more.

"Ahhhhooooooooooooooo!"

"Yes. What do you reckon it is?"

"It is Hudells. The Synthetic man. They are trying to unfix his head from the way I put it and turn it round the right way again. Come and put your head to the wall here and you can hear."

I did. Only a narrow rocky barrier separated us from another cavern.

"*Must* you make all that noise?"

"If you are being hurt as I am being," growled Hudells, "you would make still more noise."

"I couldn't. But you didn't holler when Holors stretched your neck in the first place," said the Professor's soothing voice.

"That was different. That was for a fight. Besides, it did not hurt so much then. It has got stiff," said the booming voice of Hudells.

"A lot of blood has infiltrated into the flesh," agreed the Professor. "Making it painful to touch. But if we leave it long the head will grow in this position. Come! Let us try once more."

"Ahhhhhhhhoooooooooooooooooo!"

"Has it moved any?" asked somebody, Grumbold, perhaps.

"No. It is exactly where it was before."

"Look here!" roared Hudells. "Stop this fooling! There is one man who can put my head back again the way it was."

"Who is that?"

"Why, the man who put it like it is! Holors! Send for him!"

There was a lot more talk too, but through all that rock it was not so easy to hear it all. The synthetic warrior, Hudells, was clearly not at all easy for the other two rogues to handle, but when he got too frisky Grumbold would say, in a silky voice, "Perhaps the general wishes to leave us," and Hudells would calm down at once.

A lot of argument began about Holors.

"I've put up with a lot," Hudells boomed. It was impossible to mistake his voice. "But I will not put up with a head stuck like this as a permanency."

The professor said something diplomatic, then Grumbold said, in a resigned voice, "Oh, all right then. *Fetch* him."

CHAPTER VI

I Make a Break

SO VANS and I worked it out. While we were being led along the rock passage he was to make a diversion and I was to slip away.

They came all right. The door of the cavern opened and Martians called to us, "Holors! You are wanted."

"And supposing I will not come?" Vans asked.

"Then we shall use our deathrays on you at half-strength and carry you unconscious, on a stretcher."

It was easy to see that, in spite of their big curved swords and deadly rays, they were all half afraid of the mighty Vans and his mightier reputation. For this man, but for the snake, would have whacked their three-ton synthetic champion, and that, to them, was a man-size miracle. Little me, dodging between Vans' legs, didn't get much attention.

"What's this pesky little Earthling doing here?" snapped a Martian, as we filed out.

"Tread on it and squash it," suggested another.

"The Earthling comes with me," roared Holors. "If I come the Earthling comes."

"What's that? Do you want to be rayed?" snarled someone.

Vans made a dash. At once there was a mix-up. The Martians could not use their rays without bringing down their friends as well. I wanted to stay and help Vans in that fight, but I had to keep to our plan. I could perhaps get away from this place. He could not.

While their attention was all on Vans I jumped for a shelf I had spotted high up in the rock, ran along a natural ledge, jumped again.

It is amazing how one can climb in the light gravity of Mars. I bet you I could climb to the top of any skyscraper in New York or Chicago in ten minutes under Martian conditions. Grumbold's men had never expected me to be able to climb like it. I don't suppose they had ever seen anything like it before. "A human fly!" I heard one gasp.

I was not feeling so good, at that. Because they were swinging deathrays into action. And I had several miles to fall, if I fell. Still, I had not far to go to be in the dark. That was a comfort. Although climbing about the face of a precipice in pitch darkness is a form of amusement that I do not recommend you to try.

Well, anyway, chiefly by luck, I made it. I got nicely behind a big, solid, outjutting boulder. And looked back.

Vans, stout fellow, had managed to jostle the aim of those Martians who had succeeded in getting deathrays lined on me. But he had taken some nasty wounds in the back from their swords. He was putting up a whale of a scrap. And when you remember that it was only an hour or so after his great fight with the synthetic giant, and that he was still dizzy from the effect of the snake-bite—well Vans was a great fellow, bone-head or not.

It made me feel bad to watch him and to do nothing to help. I wanted to yell to him to give in. What was the use of his fighting there and taking so much punishment? He couldn't get away.

But once Vans started fighting he kept on until he either won or was unconscious. Vans was built that way. There's a saying, "He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day." Vans did not seem to have heard of it.

THEY got him finally but not before three of them had gone flying over the edge. Whether it was a sword that got him or a deathray, I could not quite see. He collapsed all at once.

"That's a man! That's what I call a *man!*" boomed an admiring voice. Hudells had come out of the cave. He was sitting in a wheeled chair, and a Martian was pushing it backwards so that Hudells could see where he was going.

"Oh, you do, do you," murmured Grumbold, softly menacing.

"I know a real man when I see one," boomed Hudells. "Don't forget that when I teamed up with you I never expected so many hanky-panky tricks. I like fighting on the level."

The professor's voice changed, becoming sort of dry and rasping.

"You are not forgetting, are you, Hudells?"

"Forgetting what?"

"That without regular supplies of

my powder, which only I know the secret of, you would die a painful death in a few weeks."

Hudells' enormous fists clenched tightly and his eyes blazed.

"No. I am not forgetting," he said, in a voice that sounded strained, as though it was all he could do to keep from leaping from the chair and dashing at the professor, "but remember, what *I* said. Try it on. Just try it on. And you will see how much damage I can do before I go under. I'll make a mess of your lab. *And* you," he ended, roaring.

He signalled to his attendants to wheel him forward. Vans, with several different kinds of powerful Martian drugs injected, or inhaled into him, was sitting up dizzily.

"Here you," said Hudells. "You did this to me."

"Did what?" muttered Vans dazed.

"Turned my frontispiece into my back page."

"Ah, yes, I see," said Vans, grinning. "You look very funny."

"I know. Just put it right again, will you?"

"Do you mind waiting till I get my wind back? I am nearly out," Vans asked.

"Yes, I reckon you are," Hudells agreed. "You don't want to go on fighting when the other bloke has got you cold, see? And we got you cold now, see? Best give in, Mr. Holors. Else you only get hurt, see?"

"I see," said Vans.

"All right. Well, I reckon you can fix this head of mine the right way without the help of these other fools." He looked at the professor. "You and me will just put that right with no one else around. See?" he said to Vans.

"I see," said Vans.

Vans and Hudells vanished into a small cave.

"Where's that Earthling?" snapped the professor, remembering me.

"Got away, sir. Climbed the rocks and is hiding somewhere out there," reported somebody.

"Impossible!" rasped the professor. "No human being could climb over that sheer rock face!"

"That Earthling did, sir."

"Seems you have miscalculated," purred Grumbold, sneeringly. "Now he'll get right away, spill the beans, and we shall have Usulor's air force up here to argue with."

"Oh, no we won't," the other snapped. "Not even an Earthling can get away from here. I tell you again, I chose this as the most inaccessible spot in Mars. No matter which way you try to go from here, the overhang is terrific. Nothing larger than a spider could make it in full light. And you fear the Earthling may do it in darkness. Pffff! Besides. The Earthling cannot be far away. Get half a dozen men out, mounted on Pteros, carrying searchlights, and we'll pick him up in a few minutes."

"That's the most sensible thing you've said for a long time," said Grumbold. "You, you, you, you, you and you. You heard what Prof. said. Go to the cave of the Pteros and find that Earthling. If you find him in half an hour I might reconsider punishing you for letting him go. Otherwise, it will be bad for you. Get me?"

They did. They went, leaving the Prince and his scientist alone.

OF COURSE, I had been expecting these villains to get up to some trick of that sort. And I hadn't been still. I had been quietly moving round in the darkness.

"How much longer have I to endure the insolence of Hudells?" wheezed Grumbold.

"Let your Highness wait but a little while. Then I will have another dozen or so synthetic men ready. We will soon be rid of Hudells."

This snake-in-the-grass treachery did not surprise the fat Prince.

"Yes, that's all right, I know," he wheezed. "You are supposed to be the brains of this outfit. But until your synthetic men are ready I have to submit to indignity . . ."

The two disappeared into a large cavern. And as they did so I dropped to the ground behind them.

When people are looking for me I like to be just where they least expect to find me.

CHAPTER VII

Synthetic Men

"NOW see here," said Hudells, as he wheeled his chair into the cave behind Vans, "there is no need for you and me to be enemies."

"Huh?" said Vans.

"No," urged the synthetic giant. "You are a great fighter. Turning my head round like this was a smart trick. Now, let us be friends. When the Prof. has made umpteen synthetic men like me, Usulor's army won't stand any chance at all, see?"

"That's what you think."

"Yes, that's what I think. And I know. See?"

"And so what?"

"So you had better team up with us, see? And when Usulor is whipped I'll see you are all right."

"Thanks. But I don't go back on my friends. See?" Vans snapped.

"Now that's silly talk. Think over what I said. Perhaps you will change your mind."

"I'll think about it," Vans said, "but—"

"That's better. Now will you put my head the way it ought to be?"

"And if I don't?"

"I'd rather not talk about that. It is not pleasant."

"All right," agreed Vans, helplessly. "You've got me cold, as you say."

"That's horse sense," said Hudells. "Better get out of that chair."

Hudells got out.

"Now lie on your back."

Hudells did. His face was to the ground. Vans thoughtfully put a cushion under it.

"Give me your arms."

Hudells did.

Vans sat on the great chest of the synthetic giant. He took one arm under each armpit. His knees were on the other's chest.

Suddenly he heaved upwards with his strength.

"Here! What is the game?" demanded the startled Hudells.

As Vans had guessed the arms of the synthetic body stretched exactly as the neck had done.

"What are you at?" roared Hudells.

In a few moments Vans had tied the great arms in a knot at the elbows.

"If this is a trick!" hissed Hudells, breathing slaughter.

"Now sit up," said Vans. "And I'll see to your neck."

Hudells tried to sit up, but, with his arms the way they were now, could not make it. Vans helped him. In a few moments the giant's head was back to normal.

"Ah! That's better," breathed Hudells. "A neat, quick jerk. I hardly felt it. Now what about my arms?"

"Well," said Vans, thoughtfully, "I promised to put your neck right, but I sort of can't remember making any promise about your arms."

Hudells jumped up, his face black with rage.

"See here, Mister, you think you are clever—"

"I *am* clever," said Vans, modestly. "See what you can do about it with your arms like that."

Hudells rushed at him. Vans dodged, seized an ankle. Unable to use his arms to save himself, Hudells fell with a crash.

"I am rather afraid," Vans muttered, "that your friends will find it still more difficult to untie your arms than they did to put that other little matter right."

"If you think you can get away with this, you are mad," hissed the giant, trying to get up. With his mighty arms useless, he could only wriggle.

Vans watched his struggles for a few moments, then lifted him.

"Daddy help little man," he said. "Diddums want to walkee-walkee?"

Hudells launched a furious kick at him. But Vans was ready. He dodged, seized the heel. Hudells fell again.

"Naughty, naughty!" chided Vans.

Hudells opened his mouth to yell for help. But Vans hefted a big stone over his head.

"Little man had better be good. Not make a noise," he said. "His brain is not synthetic, and it might get spoiled."

"Little man" was quiet.

"What do you aim to do?" he asked, in surly tones.

NOW, I have a confession to make. I know you think me a smart guy. Resourceful, quick-witted, courageous and all the rest of the guff. I don't know where you got those ideas. As for courage, I don't believe in it. It is better to be artful than brave. "He who fights and runs away may live to fight another day." As I tell that big sap, Vans. As for being clever, well, I can make some pretty big blunders sometimes.

And I made one then.

You see when Prince Grumbold and his tame scientist went into their cavern, leaving the coast clear for me for a moment, and I dropped to the ground behind them, my idea had been to go into the cavern where Vans was and somehow help him get the better of that moving mountain, Hudells. Beyond that I hadn't much idea. When you are in a jam like Vans and me were it's not much use thinking out plans beforehand. You never get a chance to carry them out. Watch, see what happens, and do whatever you get a chance to do.

Well, anyway, I know it was a damfool thing to do, but I mistook the cave. Instead of going into the cavern where Vans was, I went into another one.

As I closed the door the light came on. It was a small cavern but very long, with painted walls. I could not see the far end. A nasty place to get caught in. There was no furniture of any sort to hide behind.

I stopped, wondering if I had gone the wrong way. Vans did not seem to be here. I thought perhaps there might be a door or a turning further on. Then I heard voices and steps outside. If they came in now I would not stand the least chance against a deathray here. It was a trap.

I began running, very quietly and fast, along the tunnel.

It was a long tunnel, and gave off many branches. I took several turnings, just in case I was being followed. Soon I was quite lost.

The tunnel came to an end. Before me was a white door, just a little way open. I could see curious things beyond.

As I stepped up to it a bell began to ring suddenly.

It was one of those wretched alarms the Martians are so fond of, worked by an invisible light-ray and a photoelectric cell. Usually, being so much smaller than the Martians, I can pass under the rays, but not always. This one, worse luck, happened to be set low.

"Who are you? What do you want?" rasped a voice inside.

I didn't know what to say.

The door flew open.

The professor stood in the doorway. First he looked over my head, expecting to see a Martian. Then he looked down and saw me.

But he didn't say anything. Because I rushed forward, between his legs. It was the only way. I didn't stand any chance in that bare tunnel if he turned a ray on me. In the laboratory I might.

My rush, quite unexpected, knocked him off his balance. He fell with a crash in the doorway.

Judging by the noise he made, he was not very pleased.

I took a quick glance round just to see where I was.

IT WAS a very big place. That Martian scientist certainly needed plenty of room to work in by the looks of things. Big bottles, cans by the thousand, apparatus of all sorts. And against one wall, lying on shelves, were bodies, living or dead, of Martians. Row behind row, row beside row, shelf above shelf, layer above layer. Countless thousands of them.

Their eyes were open, their lips slightly apart, they all looked exactly alike. They seemed about to spring from their shelves at any moment. They lay in different attitudes, and several of them were moving their arms or legs very slowly as I watched.

It was their exact alikeness, as though they were all twin brothers and sisters, that told me what they were. They were the "Professor's" synthetic bodies, neither living nor dead, waiting to be provided with brains. Each one had a number and a name tattooed, very small, behind his or her left ear. Next to each man was a woman, then another man and so on. Though what on Mars that crazy scientist wanted with so many females I can't think. I should have thought he had enough trouble already.

But, as you can guess, I did not have time to examine them very closely. That professor was getting on his hind legs again, and I had to attend to him. He met my eyes. No sir, it definitely was not a smile of welcome that he gave me. Neither did he say, "How do you do, my dear Prince!"

No sir. His manners were very, very bad. He just made a queer hissing noise, picked up the nearest heavy object and threw it at me, hard. If I had stayed where I was it would not have done me any good. I thought it best to be somewhere else. There was a smashing of glass and choking fumes began to arise. Sulphuric acid, I think.

Another missile followed and another.

He hadn't much chance of hitting me, of course. He seemed to realize it.

He filled a large glass out of a large bottle. Whatever it was that he poured into the glass smoked as he poured it. Then he came towards me. And the look on his face told me that he didn't mean to do me any good.

Well, I didn't fancy getting half a gallon of sulphuric acid in my face. That Martian glass held about half a gallon. And, roomy as that Martian laboratory was, I soon found that it was not at all a good place in which to be with a man who has half a gallon of sulphuric acid in his hand and means to give you the benefit of it. It was too full of things to trip one up, and of blind alleys likely to trap one between machines or between rows of synthetic men.

I decided to put the lights out, if I could, and get away in the darkness. I threw every switch I came across that looked like a light-switch.

No lights went out, but various machines began to hum.

"You maniac!" screamed the professor.

Beside us all those synthetic men began to stir. Some turned their heads from side to side, inquiringly. Some raised themselves on their elbows. And some lowered their legs over their bunks' sides and got ready to step out onto the floor of the bunk beneath.

CHAPTER VIII

The Girls Follow

THE worst of not being used to writing stories, like me, is that it is so easy to get them faced with the wrong part first sort of business. Here I have been telling you all this time how me and Vans got on, and I clean forgot to say what Wimpolo, that Martian wife of mine, was up to. Because, without me to control her, you can bet your last cent she would be up to some mischief.

You remember I said that Wimp had told me she was going to see the fight in disguise. At the time I rather wondered whether I ought to put my foot down and put a stop to that nonsense for Wimp's own sake. But I decided that if I said nothing perhaps she would forget about it.

And did she? Like hell!

She went straight to Olla, wife of Vans Holors. And when two saucy cats like Wimp and Olla put their fluffy heads together you can bet there's something doing.

"And why is little me picked out for such an honor as a visit from the great Princess?" purred Olla. Or something like that. All sarcastic you know. I think myself that Olla is just a wee bit jealous of the Princess.

"Forget that stuff," says Wimp. "These husbands of ours are going to get themselves into trouble."

"You're telling *me,*" says Olla, forgetting even her cattiness for a time. "Ever know that gorilla of mine when he *didn't* get into trohble? If he went to Heaven there would be a brawl among the angels right away. And he would be up to his eyebrows in it."

"I wasn't thinking so much about your chimpanzee," says Wimp, "as about my little Don."

"Chimpanzee," says Olla, through her nose. "Just because I can't have dinner with my husband sitting on my shoulder and have him fall off and nearly get drowned in my soup you can't call my man a chimp!"

Olla exaggerates. That only happened once. And it wasn't Wimp's soup I fell in. It was the tureen. And I didn't nearly get drowned. Old Usulor fished me out with a large ladle.

"We got to work together," says Wimp.

"How?"

"You are not going to let your husband get out of your sight, are you?"

"Well, hadn't thought of it," says Olla.

"No," says Wimp, bristling. "Because you reckon that with Vans out of the way you would soon find someone else. Let me tell you that with Vans gone you would not be in the palace five minutes. You would be back in the kitchen where you belong! And you can put *that* in your powder-puff and dab it on your nose!"

The sweetest women can get very sharp with others of their own sex.

"You hold all the cards," says Olla.

"You bet I do," says Wimp, still sore about the soup-tureen crack.

"Well, what do you aim to do?" Olla asked.

"You and me," Wimp announced, "are going to disguise ourselves as men!"

"What?"

"I've got it all worked out. Don will have half a dozen guards with him when he goes to this fight. I insist on that. The captain of the guard will be you, in a false mustache. And Vans will have a new second—"

"And that will be you, in another false mustache," Olla finished.

"What do you think of that plan?"

"Crazy as the person who thought of it," says Olla. "All the same it will be fun."

AND that was what these two headstrong females did. Neither Vans nor I had any idea of it. Olla watched me and Wimp watched Vans. That was Wimp's artfulness. Either of us would have known our own wives in a moment in any disguise, but the other girl might fool us. And they did. Which only shows what games girls will get up to if they are not kept under firm control. Especially Martian girls.

Well, I've no need to tell you the story of Vans' fight with the giant Hudells all over again. Because I am only telling you now what I should have told you before if I hadn't got this story all mucked up and told you the wrong part first.

Did your wife ever disguise herself as a man and go about pretending she was looking after you when she was really out for a bit of fun? Or is it only me that has to put up with this sort of thing?

Well, anyway, those two girls thought they had Vans and me safely under their noses. But I don't need to tell you all over again what happened. That giant, Hudells, had other ideas. Vans left the building through the roof. And I followed.

Then Wimp gave tongue. She had a lot to say. She told everybody who I was, and who she was, and ordered Hudells to be arrested and put in jail on the spot, and a lot more besides.

Hudells made a fight of it, twisted as he was. He whirled on his heel, arms outstretched, and everybody near him was knocked flying. Then he made a dash for the door, but, being twisted, went in the opposite direction. But he kept going, looking over his shoulder, and his great weight smashed right through the wall.

He vanished in the darkness.

"Come on!" yells Wimp, and dashes out with her men and a water-proof sheet with the idea of catching me.

And, oh yes, I've told you that part too. How Wimp's plan was just working out nicely when that prehistoric bat-wing that ought to have been extinct millions of years ago swooped down and carted me away as though I was a fat worm.

"Airplanes!" yells Wimp. "After my husband!"

"And what about my husband?" asks Olla.

"Your husband? Hasn't he come down yet?"

Vans had not returned from his flight.

"Where my husband is we shall find yours," declares Wimp. And sets out for an airfield.

Their planes were little gyro-copters that could hover and dart. Got to have planes like that in Mars, to dodge through all those twisty caverns. There were eight of them, carrying the two silly girls and six men.

And I'm bothered if they didn't find the way, too. One of those Pteros was sighted, and they followed it.

Right to Prince Grumbold's stronghold.

CHAPTER IX

The Mastering of Hudells

MEANWHILE, Vans and that synthetic giant, Hudells, were arguing the toss in that little cavern. Not that I care much for telling a story this way. Seems an awful mix-up. First I have to tell what happened to me, then how Vans was getting on, then what Wimp was doing. But we had all got separated you see, and blow me down if I can see any other way of doing it.

So, as I said, Vans had got this Hudells nearly helpless by tying his arms together at the elbow-joints. Which, look at it how you like, was real smart of Vans. How he was able to do it I can't think. Perhaps the professor reckoned to make it impossible for his synthetic soldiers to get dislocated joints. Or perhaps synthetic cartilage didn't work so good. Or perhaps he reckoned to keep a lot of spare parts, arms, legs, heads and so forth, about, and have his men change their parts as easily as changing hats.

I don't know.

Anyway, that bigger giant could see that the littler giant had done him one in the eye, and presently he stops wriggling and says, "What do you aim to do?"

And Vans, he says, "I was just going to ask you that."

"Huh!" snorts Hudells, scornful, "I thought it was you that held the whip-hand now, Mr. Clever. I thought it was you that was giving the orders."

"I am," said Vans, lifting his big stone thoughtfully. The professor, we afterwards found, had given Hudells a skull of steel to protect his brain, but Vans would soon have crushed that with his stone. "But you know your way about here. I don't. You got to get Don and me away from this place. How you do it is *your* worry."

"Now see here," snapped Hudells, "that's impossible. Even I can't get out of this place alone. How can I take you and your little chum—?"

"You can't do it then?"

"No. I can't."

"Pity," says Vans, thoughtfully. "Because now I shall have to put on your clothes, pad myself out a bit, and pretend to be you. But first I shall have to rub you out. Pity."

He sighed and raised the stone.

Hudells sweated.

"You couldn't do it. They would see through you at once. You are not nearly as tall as me."

"True," said Vans. "But they would not notice that until I was close to them. And then they would not be interested."

"Why not?"

"I have means of making people lose interest in things," said Vans, doubling his mighty fists.

"Your plan is a mad one."

"All the same, I like it."

He lifted the stone again.

"I should advise you to close your eyes and keep still while I am crushing your head in. Don't wriggle like that. The sooner I get the job done the less pain you will feel."

HUDELLS made a desperate effort, but a sweep of the stone sent him reeling back, brain inside its steel cover severely jarred.

"I give in," said Hudells. "Don't hit me again. Steel skulls may be strong, but they transmit jars, vibrations and heat too well for me. It's ringing like a tuning-fork now."

"Now you are talking sense," says Vans.

"Will you untie my arms if I promise to help you?"

"First get me a deathray."

"In the cupboard behind you."

Vans took out the box with its switches and valves, and tested it.

"Does this work on synthetic men?" Vans asked.

"Doesn't touch them."

"Get me a disintegration ray then. That will be capable of cutting your body in pieces."

"Can't. There aren't any of those things up here. The Prof. won't have them."

Vans nodded, thoughtfully. The professor obviously did not want his men to have any possible way of hitting back at the synthetic men. The synthetics were to be the bosses. A new sort of superhuman race perhaps. While he himself kept control over them by means of his mysterious white powder. A neat and effective way of holding power.

"Guess I'll have to trust your word then," says Vans. "You used to be an honest fighter. On the up and up always."

"Till I met the Prof. with his talk of getting the championship back with a synthetic body."

"Yes. I'll take a chance then. If I untie your arms will you promise to help me and do as I tell you?"

"Guess I got no choice."

"All right then."

Untying the arms of Hudells proved more difficult than tying them, but in the end Vans succeeded. Hudells was back to normalcy.

"You are only a little shrimp," he said, admiringly, "but you got the better of me. That is the last time I try to fight you, in a snake-ring, with my brains or any other way."

"Forget the compliments," said Vans. "We have got to get busy."

"What do you aim to do, chief?"

"How can we get away from here?"

"On the backs of Pteros. There is no other way."

"How do you reach the Pteros?"

"Through the Prof's cave, past all his guards."

"I see. Would we pass the laboratory on the way?"

"Right past the door."

"Good. Now listen to me. We walk out of here together."

"Together?"

"I said, together. We meet a guard."

"And he gives the alarm at once, says you have escaped. And your plan is bust."

"No it isn't. Because he doesn't see me. He only sees you. I am behind you."

"Well?"

"You tell the guard you must see the Prof. at once. You have important news for him."

"Then we meet the Prof. and he says, 'What's the news? Spill it quick!' What then?"

"Then we pick up our deathrays, get everybody covered, back to the cave of the Pteros, and we are away!"

"Not bad," Hudells murmured. "But what about the powder? Without daily supplies of the white powder this synthetic body dies a painful death in about three months."

"Where is this powder kept?"

"In the laboratory."

"Good. On our way we make a quick dash into the laboratory, grab a bottle of this powder. And later we get chemists to analyze it and duplicate it."

"Reckon they could?"

"Certain. Emperor Usulor's chemists can do anything. What do you think of the plan?"

"It has got me scared. And I am

not easily scared."

"What have you to be scared about? Deathrays cannot hurt you, nor knives, nor clubs—"

"Clubs can hurt me when anybody as powerful as you swings them. Not in anybody else's hands, though. All the same, I'm scared. Still, my dad said to me when I was a boy, 'Bruny,' he says, 'if ever you feel scared don't stop to think. Just go right in and do what you are scared of before you have time to feel more scared. Because if you wait for your scare to ease up on you you will feel worse every minute.' So, let's go."

And he set his jaw and walked out of the cave, Vans behind him.

No guard tried to argue with "General" Hudells even when they saw Vans with him. They got into the professor's and Grumbold's office.

"The Prof. is in the lab," they were told.

"Send for him. I must see him at once." Hudells sat with crossed legs.

They waited in the Professor's office. The show-down was not far off now. I think even Vans was a *little* bit nervous as he waited.

Suddenly, a terrified scream. The messenger came running back. His eyes were bulging with terror.

"The synthetics are loose! The brainless synthetics!" he howled.

Behind him came thousands of men and women with curious staring eyes and slightly open mouths, all exactly alike. And all with no sign of human feeling in their blank, expressionless faces.

CHAPTER X

The Synthetics Loose

I KNOW what you'll say. It don't make sense. And, in a way, it don't. Those synthetics hadn't any brains. Leastways, they wasn't supposed to have any brains. And people with no brains at all are not supposed to walk about. Surprising what a little in the way of brains some people can get along with.

Yet here were people with no brains at all, I thought, sitting up, looking round, climbing down from their bunks and walking all over the place. But I reckon the Prof. must have put some sort of brain in each one of them. Not a high-class, reasoning brain. Not even, so far as I could tell, a brain as good as an average dog has. Rather simpler than that. But still a brain. Able to move the body about quite efficiently. But not able to talk or to understand talk.

Maybe the Prof's synthetic-jiggery-pokery was just able to make Cerebellums, or little brains that do the instinctive work but not Cerebrums, the big brains where thinking is done. Maybe when he talked about putting brains in his synthetics he only meant Cerebrums.

But what's the use of me trying to guess what that blighter meant to do? Wait until Usulor's scientists have examined those synthetics that were recovered in good order, and then perhaps we'll know.

Anyway, I suppose that Prof. had to have some sort of brain in his synthetics or else they would just have died on him. And he must have kept them under some sort of influence, electric-magnetic field or something, to keep them only just alive, hearts only just beating. And when I threw those switches I must have cut off the field, set those hearts beating faster, waking up those Cerebellums, and letting those synthetics get down from their shelves.

The Prof. seemed to go mad. He

screamed. He hurled the glass of sulphuric acid at me and tried to push the nearest synthetics back onto their shelves. But of course they did not understand him, though he raved at them. They just looked at him, wondering. They were bigger than he was. And more were getting down every minute.

I think he was trying to get to the switch.

And that glass of sulphuric. I saw it coming, and got out of the way. It hit a synthetic, smashed, and burning acid splashed over at least a dozen of them.

A moment or so later there was an awful lot of noise there. Remember the story of Jason? The feller who planted the dragon's teeth. From each tooth there grew a fully-armed warrior. Jason threw a stone into the middle of them. The man hit by the stone hit the man he thought had hit him. The man he hit hit the man he thought had hit him. Till they were all fighting.

Well, this was something like that.

Here were a dozen people in pain who hadn't ever been in pain before. And a dozen lungs were yelling that hadn't ever yelled before. And a dozen Cerebellums were looking round to find who done it and give him a headache. Those Cerebellums had enough sense for that.

Some of them did a dragon's tooth. They hit the synthetic nearest them. Others figured it out better, and made for the Prof. Some came for me.

The Prof. didn't wait. He gave a yell and dashed out by a door.

THEN there was a mix-up.

Well, I've seen many different kinds of fighting. Air-raids, bombardments, burning cities, the round, rolling, transparent tanks of Mars, warplanes, fighting flies, fighting snakes, fighting apemen and all the chemical and scientific weapons of warped Martian genius. The fighting flies were the most horrible of all.

I'm not squeamish, not now. Mars has cured that.

But the fighting of those witless synthetics made me feel sick.

Imagine it.

They used no weapons. The use of knives, sticks or stones would have been far beyond what dim intelligence they possessed. They just used hands, feet, nails and teeth to rip, tear and gouge. They had no idea of defense, or even of avoiding blows. Pairs of synthetics just stood up and—well, never mind. Those self-repairing bodies took an awful lot of killing.

But I saw at once that if any of those synthetics got hold of me there would be no more Don Hargreaves.

They would not have been difficult to avoid, if there had not been so many of them. One would dash at me, and fall over something in the way. Falling, he would bump into another, and in another moment they would be fighting. While I watched another hand would almost close on my shoulder. I would wrench it away just in time. Then one would fall over me, and in a moment be locked in a death-grapple with the one he fell against.

Many were spilling out into the passages and corridors. Many who fell were walked upon by the steadily growing throng still climbing or falling down from the shelves. Till the steady increase in numbers mounted so that the pressure of them tore machinery and apparatus from the floor, smashing bottles and loosing torrents of deadly acids and starting one big fire into which those nearest were irresistibly pushed until piling bodies put out the fire.

I climbed to the top of the tiers of bunks, just out of the reach of clutching hands. As the framework under me collapsed under the pressure I moved further back.

Still synthetics were getting down.

I saw many synthetics crushed and killed by the simple pressure of bodies round them. And synthetics take a lot of killing.

By now thousands had spilled out of the doors, going everywhere.

Now a much bigger fire was arising, fed by the chemicals, the oils, the rubber, the plastics and the wooden fittings of the laboratory. The smoke thickened.

I saw that I must get out of here, or be choked by smoke and roasted by fire. But how? Between me and each of the doors was a solidly packed mass of synthetics.

Then I saw how. A desperate plan, perhaps. I could walk on the heads of the crowd!

I launched myself. My foot landed on the heads of one synthetic. A leap, before he could take hold of me. I landed on the shoulder of another. Another leap. On another head. On through smoke and flames.

One missed spring and I would have become just one of that doomed crowd.

I reached a door, and ducked under. I was in a passage.

They were thinner here. I missed a leap, because the man whose head I aimed at was walking fast. I landed on the ground.

A synthetic gave a weird sort of cry and rushed at me, hands outstretched.

CHAPTER XI

The Giant's Clean-Up

PRINCESS WIMPOLO, Olla and the six guards arrived at the entrance to Prince Grumbold's caves.

"Where'd that Ptero go?"

"Up there! Dozens of Pteros' caves up there!"

"How can we land there?"

"I see a landing-place!"

The auto-gyros made for the rocky shelf where Vans and I had landed. That was exactly what Grumbold had planned they should do. Now scores of the fat Prince's retainers should have rushed out and captured the Princess, according to the plan.

But that plan had been slightly sabotaged.

As the Princess' little party neared the shelf a number of men came dashing wildly out of cavern mouths. They fled madly into the cave where Vans and I had been imprisoned a little while before, and locked themselves in. Late comers tried to follow, but were barred out.

"What is the matter with those men?"

"Land and find out!"

"Did you see how they were dressed?"

"It looked to me like the uniform of the personal guards of the rebel king, Sommalu."

"But Sommalu is dead."

The eight little auto-gyros buzzed down to a landing on the little shelf. Other men and women were now coming out of the cavern mouths, people with blankly staring eyes and oddly expressionless faces. Some walked straight out of the caves and straight over the edge of the shelf, just as a baby just learning to walk might do.

They fell without a cry, soundlessly.

The guards saw that they were unarmed.

"Where is Prince Don?" rapped one guard, menacing the nearest synthetic with a deathray.

The synthetic stared stupidly.

"Where is Vans Holors?" snapped another guard.

"Whose are those Pteros?"

"Who are those men in a forbidden uniform?"

"What's the set-up here?"

Questions ripped thick and fast. But no synthetic answered.

"I'll make you understand plain Martian! Take that and wake yourself up!"

A guard struck a synthetic a stinging slap on the cheek.

The synthetic looked surprised, and then slapped back.

There was a snap. The guard fell with a broken neck.

The guard's mate swung round a deathray, pressed the lever.

The ray had no effect at all on the killer.

The synthetic, gurgling with delight at the result of the interesting action just learned, tried it on one of his mates.

In a moment the two were fighting one of the ghastly battles of the synthetics.

A dazed guard reported bewilderedly to Princess Wimpolo.

"These men seem to have no intelligence whatever, Your Highness. And they are impervious to our weapons."

"Best get into the air," said Wimpolo.

But synthetics were between her and her plane. In any case the throng was now so thick that taking off was impossible.

"If many more of these people come out of the caves we shall all be pushed over the edge," said Wimpolo.

"MY gorilla!" cried Olla, suddenly.

"What do you mean?"

"My chimpanzee! My orangoutang! We are saved!"

"Meaning your husband?"

"Surely! I heard him! He was saying, 'Out of the way, you baby-faced pie-can!' Vans! Vans!" she shouted at the top of her voice. "Here we are Come and help us!"

"What can your husband do?" growled Wimp. Rather sourly I fear.

"I hear you!" roared the mighty voice of Vans inside. "I come!"

"Yes," roared another, still mightier voice. "We come!"

It was Bruny Hudells.

The two giants came out together. Each had a steel bar in his left hand. Each swing of a bar crushed the metal skull of one synthetic and stretched it on the ground.

"We found these people could not be harmed by deathrays," Vans explained. "Nor could our fists hurt them. They nearly had us beat until we found that these clubs could break their heads and stop their Cerebellums from working."

They laid about them.

Vans and Hudells could probably have kept on until every synthetic was out of action. But the steel bars could not. They broke. Synthetics began to close on two warriors, looking ugly.

"There's another way out of this, Holors!" roared Hudells. And, picking a synthetic up by the ankles, hurled him through the air. The body flew over the edge, started the three-mile drop.

And steadily the two giants hurled synthetics over the edge as though they were no more than bags of flour.

And that is about the end of that story, barring a few odd details. I was easily found, but Prince Grumbold and his tame scientist escaped. On the back of the Pteros I think. And *was* it a game, getting the enormous Hudells down from that rock shelf! Of course, no auto-gyro that could land there was capable of carrying such a weight. In the end we got a specially big parachute made, and hauled him on a long rope to where he could be dropped in safety. Even then it was a dickens of a job.

Those synthetic men that were not killed all died in a few hours. Without Cerebrums they could not live long. The Pteros ate the bodies. Pretty indigestible meat, I should think, but it did not seem to do them any harm.

Oh, and we could not find Hudells' white powder. It was all destroyed in the wreck of the laboratory. But Professor Winterton is confident of being able to replace it. Says he thinks it is just Vitamin C. The flesh of the synthetics being able to absorb huge amounts of Vitamin C, he says, might partly explain how they were able to repair themselves so rapidly after injury. From what I can make of it Vitamin C seems to behave like glue in the human body, sticking the different parts together.

I hope it solves the problem that is worrying Hudells, anyway.

I asked Vans Holors what he thought of all this business, and he said, "All that trouble for nothing! I still have not fought the real Tony Galento! Next time you radio Earth, enclose another challenge to that baby. And this time see the right man gets it. Better send one to Joe Louis, too, while you are at it."

I ask you! What can you do with a man like that?

WHAT ABOUT THE MOON?

REGARDLESS of the intensive observations and studies made of the moon during the last several centuries, it continues to remain more or less of a mystery. However, we do know some facts about this neighbor of ours which are quite interesting and helpful.

The moon is classed by the astronomers as a satellite. By definition, a satellite is a planet which has the characteristic of revolving around a planet.

Although there are 27 different moons, our moon is the largest in relation to the planet it is revolving about, having a diameter of roughly 2,160 miles, which is about one-third of the diameter of the earth.

The motion of the moon causes it to make a complete revolution about the earth in twenty-seven and one-third days, and its time of rotation about its own axis is precisely the same. Since these two periods of revolution are equal, astronomers have been able to observe only one-half of the moon's surface. Furthermore, unless some unforeseen cataclysmic event takes place, we will never be able to see the other side of the moon.

Astronomers contend that the density of the material on the moon is approximately 3½ times as great as that of water or about 220 pounds per cubic foot. Since this value is rather close to the density of the Earth's immediate surface, it tends to substantiate the theory that the moon was once a part of the Earth. However, other advanced technical studies indicate that the moon came into existence on its own as an integral part of the universe.

An interesting thing to note is that on the moon a person would only weigh one-sixth as much as he does on the earth. This is due to the fact that the moon has a much smaller mass than the earth, and since the magnitude of gravitational attraction varies directly as the mass, the gravitational force of the moon is consequently much smaller than the earth's.

Of course, weight is a result of gravitation: if there were no gravitation there would be no weight. Also, at the center of the earth the mass has no weight. For example, a person weighing 200-pounds on the earth would only weigh 34-pounds on the surface of the moon. However, due to the nearness of the moon, its gravitational attractions do affect the earth in such ways as tides. The comparatively small gravitational attraction of the moon prevents it from retaining an atmosphere equivalent to the earth's. In fact, if one were able to live on the moon, he would have to set up many precautionary measures against the rays from the sun which would strike directly the surface of the moon. On the other hand, in the evening, he would be able to see the stars without any mist or fog to impede his eye sight. This lack of atmosphere also allows the astronomers to carefully and thoroughly examine the surface of the moon.

ADAM'S EVE

By Richard O. Lewis

Adam Harper left his own time-dimension to rescue the victim of an experiment. He did not succeed—but the reward was Eve!

ADAM HARPER didn't know when it was he had fallen in love with the *shadow*.

Perhaps it had been upon that first day when she had appeared out of nowhere in his lonely laboratory. Had it been a week ago? Two weeks?

Adam Harper didn't know. After all, when a man lives for three years alone in a laboratory and away from civilization with nothing more animate than a machine and a dog . . . well, he is likely to lose a certain amount of perspective; likely, even, to fall in love with a shadow.

Adam paused in his work at the table to look at her again, to marvel at her beauty.

She was standing beside the huge machine watching him.

"Beautiful," he murmured. "Beautiful and primitive."

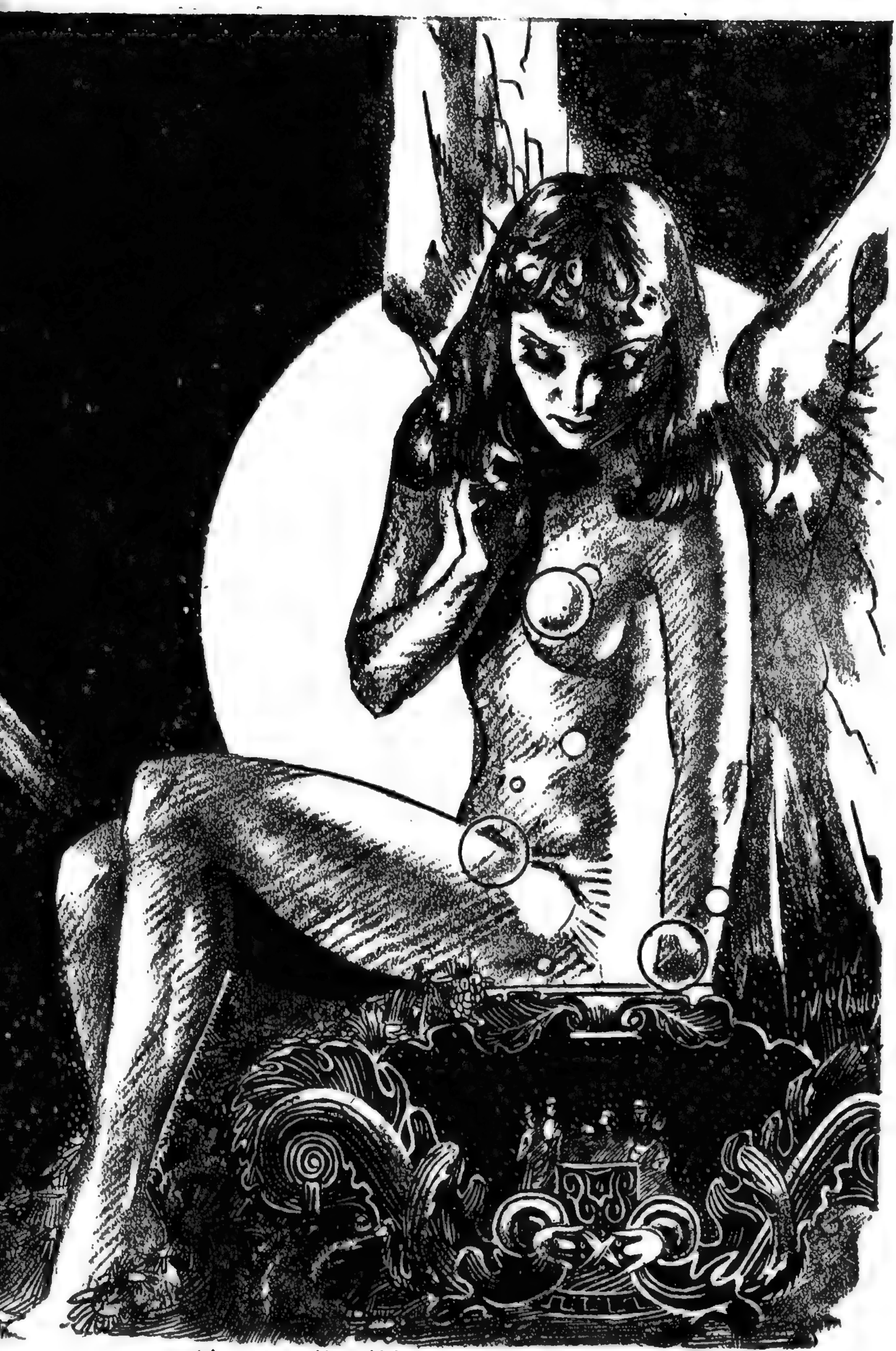
His eyes traveled the symmetrical length of her. The slender roundness of her legs. The curve of her hips, covered only by what appeared to be a loin cloth. The bare torso. The full breasts. And the cascade of hair that framed her oval face and fell in folds about her shapely shoulders.

He wondered about the color of that hair. Would it be brown? Red? Yellow? Golden? And what about the lips and the round eyes?

But he had no way of knowing. She was but a shadow, and the far wall of the laboratory was dimly visible through her body.

Adam felt keenly his responsibility for the girl. It was due to his experiments with the time-dimension that she had been caught up out of her remote past and stranded somewhere between that past and the present.

Adam did not thoroughly understand the fourth-dimension—the time-dimension—as it was usually called. It was just as impossible for him to understand the fourth-dimension as it would



Adam gave up his world for her—and found it a small price to pay be for a two-dimensional creature on a flat surface to understand the third-dimension.

Yet, he knew something about it. He knew that all the events of the past, present and future existed simultaneously like photos in a huge album. And light rays were flowing through the book, illuminating first one page and then the other. All humanity and events moved with the light rays. And each light ray represented a NOW. The people of one NOW could not see the people of another NOW because the light rays were changing, fading the past for each NOW and slowly illuminating the future.

This changing of light rays was the fourth-dimension, the time-dimension that the human brain could not quite grasp.

That was why Adam Harper had built the machine; he wanted to see if it were possible to step through the pages of the album from one NOW to another NOW. And he had succeeded.

TWICE, he had sent Tige, his faithful dog, into the remote past by merely changing the light rays and sense perceptions of the animal with the aid of the machine he had built. Each time, he had sent along a crystallization of light rays in a packet of hamburger tied to the dog's collar. And each time, Tige had torn the packet from his collar after an hour or so in the past and had returned to Adam's NOW, bringing back pictures of the remote past that had been taken with a small automatic camera strapped to his back.

But the *third* time Tige had not reappeared.

Instead, the girl had come. Not in the flesh; but as a shadow. Obviously, she had eaten Tige's hamburger.

"There was too much difference in weight between her and Tige," Adam reasoned as he had tried to explain the situation to himself. "The crystallization of light rays meant for Tige was only enough to bring *her* to some half-way point. Now she is stranded there. The crystallization made her visible to me, but was not powerful enough to bring her through."

The girl seemed thinner now than when she had first appeared in the laboratory. And that bothered Adam. What if there was no food in that half-way world? What if she were *starving?*

That thought always left Adam cold.

He had tried to get her out of that half-way world. Several times, he had turned the rays of the machine upon her shadowy figure. But those rays, he found, would not reach across the time-dimension, would not send her back as they had sent Tige.

Then he had tried to bring her into the laboratory, into his own NOW, by sending apples to her, apples that had been impregnated with sufficient light-ray crystallization to take her out of her precarious existence.

So far he had failed.

"If I just knew what time-period she was existing in," he kept telling himself, "it would be easy." But he had no way of knowing.

Once again, he went to the great machine that stood near the wall of the laboratory, and closed one of the switches. He made adjustments on it that would change the light rays it would send out. Then, while the tubes were warming, he placed another apple on the platform before it.

She was standing near him as he bent over. He could feel her presence as always when he was near her. It seemed that there was some magnetic pull between them.

He saw her hand reach out toward

him as it had done many times in the past. But the hand did not touch him, it passed completely through his brow.

"Don't worry," he told her. "I'll get you out of this somehow."

He indicated the apple upon the platform, and stood up.

She was smiling at him, and he had an almost overwhelming desire to gather her into his arms. But he knew that such a gesture would be useless; his arms would pass through her shadowy body the same as they had a few days before.

Once more he indicated the apple, and she nodded. It seemed that she understood what he was trying to do. Then he closed another switch upon the machine.

A soundless vibration shimmered across the platform for an instant, enveloping the apple, blurring its outline. Then it was gone.

ADAM shut off the machine and indicated the spot where the apple had been. She shook her head; the apple had not arrived in her time-dimension.

Several more times he tried, adjusting the machine to a different time-dimension before each try.

Finally, he sat down in a chair and held his weary head in his hands. The despair of failure was upon him. "It would be an accident," he told himself patiently, "a miracle if I should hit her time-period out of all the thousands of years of existence. But I can't just let her stay there, starve. . . ."

He looked at her again, his eyes following the shadowy contour of her body. She was lovely. The most beautiful thing he had ever seen. And she had become an obsession with him.

Adam Harper was a tall young man with dark hair and a broad, white forehead. The forehead was wrinkled now with his troubles, making him look older than he actually was.

"If I could just find a way. . . ."

Then, suddenly, the thought-wrinkles cleared from his forehead, and he leaped to his feet. "I've got it!" he shouted. "I've got it! I've *found* a way!"

It was so simple that Adam wondered why he had not thought of it long ago.

He knew that the NOW the girl had once lived in, the NOW where she existed at present and his own NOW were running parallel through the photo album of Time, each maintaining its exact relationship with the other. Then, instead of trying to get the crystallization of light rays to her by the hit-and-miss method of apples, *he could take those light rays to her in person!*

"All I'll have to do," he told himself, "is to set the ray machine the same as I did when I sent Tige through. That will take me into the same time-dimension as it did Tige. Once there, I can subject my own body to the same amount of light-ray crystallization as the girl did when she ate Tige's packet of hamburger. That will put me into her present time-existence! And I'll take along enough of the light-ray crystallization to bring us both back here to the laboratory. . . ."

Adam Harper was so carried away with the possibility of seeing her in the flesh at last and of bringing her back with him that the dangers of the trip never entered his mind. It never occurred to him that he might make a mistake, that something might go wrong. . . .

He smiled reassuringly at the girl as he set hurriedly about making arrangements for the culmination of his plan.

"It won't be long," he told her. "Soon I'll be with you. Soon we'll be together!"

Adam was ready within a half hour.

He was standing on the platform before the giant ray machine, waiting for the automatic device he had installed, waiting for it to close the second switch.

In his hands were several packets of prepared hamburger sandwiches. One of them he would give to Tige to insure the dog's safe return. He would eat one of the others. That would take him into the girl's time-dimension. Then he would have two left; one for the girl and one for himself.

He saw the concern that showed in her eyes as he stood upon the platform. She had seen those apples disappear into nothingness. Obviously, she was wondering if the same thing would happen to him.

"It'll be all right," he told her. He knew that she couldn't hear him, but he was being carried away by his emotions and the prospect of being with her soon.

"It'll be all right. Don't be alarmed. I'll be with you in a few minutes." His whole body was trembling. "Just wait. . . ."

There was an almost inaudible *click* as the automatic device closed the switch.

ADAM felt the sudden surge of shimmering light rays as they struck his body. They were similar to X-rays—making his body invisible to the NOW of his own time-existence; they were like a gentle impulse that pushed him through a gossamer curtain into a world of bright sunshine.

He stood blinking for a moment, waiting for his eyes to become accustomed to the change from the dark laboratory to the naked sunlight.

Then he saw with a sudden welling up of elation that the first step of his journey had been successful. . . .

He was standing upon the edge of a sandy plain that stretched away into a barren waste at his left. To his right were low rock formations with a jumble of loose stone.

. . . the same place that Tige had been. The scene corresponded with the pictures Tige's automatic camera had brought back.

Distance shouts and cries broke into Adam's consciousness. His eyes swept the scene again, and saw straight ahead of him the cause of the disturbance. A cloud of dust was hanging over the edge of the plain, and in that cloud of dust men were fighting.

He saw some of them—squat, ape-like creatures—brandishing clubs and screaming guttural war-cries. But, in the dust and distance, he could not see clearly the opponents of the squat men.

Adam knew that he was in no danger from the fighting men; they were too far away and too busily engaged to notice him.

"Tige!" he cried. "Tige!"

He didn't want to go away and leave the dog stranded here if the dog were still alive.

He waited a moment, his eyes scanning the plain. "Tige!" he called again, louder this time. "Tige! Come Tige!"

It was then that he heard the click of a stone as it rolled down from a jumble of rock behind him. He wheeled about, fully expecting to see the yellow and white Tige bolting toward him, tail threshing and lips grinning.

But it was not the dog coming down over the pile of rock; it was a squat, ape-like thing with a gnarled club.

The sudden appearance of the beast-man—not over twenty paces away—sent a paralyzing fear through Adam that rooted him to the spot. He couldn't move.

The creature's forehead sloped back,

his brows were prominent and shaggy over bloodshot eyes, his thick jaws were covered with a grisly beard and his chest looked like a barrel that had sprouted a thick growth of unhealthy hair.

Adam realized instantly that this man was not of the same race as the girl. This man was probably a part of an invading force. And that would explain the fight. . . .

"Hello," said Adam.

But the man didn't seem to be in the mood for conversation. He came forward slowly, his uneven teeth bared and his club half raised. Stalking.

ADAM took an uncertain step backward and began fumbling with the packet of hamburgers, his fingers tumbling over each other like so many thumbs. He wanted to eat one of those hamburgers and get out of the picture as soon as possible. He knew that he would be no match against this brute with a club if it came to any kind of a fight.

He saw the creature's wide nostrils flare. Obviously, those nostrils had scented the food, and the man was hungry. Perhaps the beast-man had been hunting food somewhere beyond the ridge of rocks. . . .

Adam almost had the packet open when the brute charged. The beast-thing didn't swing with the club; it merely leaped forward, its hairy hands grasping for the food.

Adam knew that the loss of the food would spell disaster, disaster for him, for the stranded girl, for Tige—if the dog were still alive.

He did the only thing he could think of under the circumstances: clutching the food tightly to him with his left arm, he balled his right fist and brought it up in a quick hay-maker to the dull point of the grisly chin.

There was a sharp *crack*. The beast-man's bloodshot eyes snapped shut and flew open again. He staggered back a pace.

Then, as if the blow had surprised and angered the creature rather than hurt him, a hideous and savage snarl gushed from the wide mouth and he charged, club swinging.

Adam tried to leap aside, but the soft sand gave way suddenly beneath his feet. A sharp twinge lanced his left leg as his ankle turned painfully beneath him. He stumbled backward, measuring his length upon the sand.

That fall was the only thing that saved him from the sweep of the club.

The beast-man recovered quickly from the empty swing and was raising the weapon again.

A thousand thoughts hammered through Adam's brain as he lay there helplessly upon his back in the sand. He knew by the mad light in the wild-man's eyes that the brute intended to kill him now.

He thought of the girl, stranded in some time-dimension beyond him. Alone. Starving, perhaps. And he couldn't reach her. . . .

He thought of the ray machine and his laboratory. Some day, someone would stumble on to the laboratory and see the machine and wonder about it. And there would be the shadow of a beautiful girl there. . . .

And he thought about the crystallization of light rays in the hamburgers. If he could but have time to eat one! He knew what would happen once those light rays were released within him from their crystalline state. A dull glow would permeate his entire being and diffuse itself about him, a glow not unlike the fluorescence sometimes seen in the hair and fingernails of an aspirin-eater when subjected to the invisible rays of black light. . . .

But there was no time. The beast-man's face was twisted hideously, the club already in descent.

Adam knew there was but a second left. But he couldn't move as the club swirled toward him. It was the last. . . .

AND then there came a sudden, snarling streak. It was a yellow and white savage streak with its ears laid back. It seemed to come from nowhere; and it ended abruptly at the back of one of the beast-man's legs.

There was a sharp howl of pain. The club swept wildly away from its mark. The beast-man spun about in his tracks.

Adam struggled to a sitting position, every nerve fiber within him tingling with relief at what his eyes told him was true.

"Tige!" he shouted as he saw the yellow and white snarling streak close in again. "Good boy, Tige! Chew hell out of him!"

But Tige seemed to know more about his business than his master did. The dog had leaped away out of range of the swinging club, was staying out of range, dancing and snarling, teeth dripping crimson.

Several times, the beast-man turned menacingly toward Adam, but, each time, Tige came flashing in, his teeth lancing and ripping at the bare legs.

The hamburger stuck to the roof of Adam's dry mouth like so much gluey sawdust. He took another bite, trying to force the previous one down. He stretched his neck like a chicken that had got an oversized grain of corn caught in its gullet. He chewed and gulped. He choked and swallowed, and chewed and gulped some more. His throat felt dry and sticky. He wanted a drink. . . .

And then, with a last choking gulp, the food was down.

He knew it would be but a matter of seconds now.

"Good boy, Tige!" he called, and tossed a hamburger in the dog's direction. "That will get you back to the lab."

Then a shimmering mist rose before Adam's eyes, a shimmering mist that was as a curtain between him and another time-dimension—another page in the photo album. . . .

The mist cleared as quickly as it had come. The beast-man, the dog, the desert of fighting men, and the jumble of rock were gone.

Adam found himself lying in lush grass beneath a mild, warm sun. Where the sandy plain had once been was now a grove of trees, trees with fruit-laden branches. A tiny brook gurgled and tinkled where but a moment before had been a senseless jumble of stone. Birds piped cheerful melodies, and the drone of bees lent a feeling of drowsy contentment.

"Why, it's like a paradise!" said Adam, aloud. "An Eden!"

But there was a dim shadow over the scene, the shadowy outline of a laboratory, a giant machine and a work table. It was like a double exposure on a negative.

He wondered about it for a moment. Perhaps the time-dimension he was now in and the time-dimension occupied by the laboratory were closely akin. Or perhaps the use of that giant ray-machine had sensitized the walls and equipment of the laboratory, making them shadowy visible in this other time-dimension. . . .

The twisted ankle was not paining him now. He got slowly to his feet and turned around.

And then he saw the girl, her graceful body bold against the backdrop of green branches behind her.

A GASP escaped Adam's lips. When she had been but a shadow in the laboratory, his imagination had run riot—trying to build up a tangible picture of her. But now! Now that he was actually seeing her! He wondered how his imagination could have done her such an injustice!

Her whole body was of a delicate, satiny bronze. The hair that fell about her naked shoulders and over the curve of her breasts was like golden strands that had been spun upon some elfen loom from the raw rays of a shimmering moon. Green eyes were spaced wide beneath arched brows in an oval face that was perfection. And even rows of sparkling teeth enhanced the smile of curved, inviting lips. . . .

Adam's senses reeled at the stark reality and nearness of her beauty. He had reached her at last! Had reached the time-dimension where she was stranded! And in his hands was a packet of hamburgers: one for the girl and one for himself!

It didn't quite seem possible that he, Adam Harper, should be alone here with this girl! He, Adam. . . .

A disquieting thought stung his brain. He tried to pull the thought loose; but it stuck there, poisoning him with uncertainty.

He, Adam! And this girl who was smiling at him! This girl in a Garden of Eden! This girl in the loin clout of plaited, green leaves! Could it be. . . . Could she be *Eve?*

He remembered the Biblical story of Genesis concerning Adam and Eve, and was suddenly afraid.

"If there are no other human beings in this time-dimension," he thought; "if we are the only ones, then it has been predestined that we do not return to the laboratory—and I am destined to become the . . . father of a new . . . *a new race!*"

He glanced about, fully expecting to see the serpent lurking somewhere in the grass nodding its head knowingly. . . .

The girl was coming toward him now, the smile widening her red lips. Never before had Adam seen a body move with such languorous grace. It did something to him.

Her arms were partially outstretched in his direction. And, as she stepped out into the direct rays of the soft sun, her golden hair sprang into sudden life, engulfing the oval of her face in a halo of shimmering radiance.

Adam took a step backward. Things were coming too fast for him now. He wanted a little time—a little time to think it over. . . .

Then the girl stopped. The smile left her lips. The light that was in her eyes faded into a terrified stare. A tiny shriek of warning started from her lips.

Adam wheeled about, and a cold chill raced down his spine.

THERE, not three paces behind him, was a squat, bearded individual with protruding brows and a receding forehead! The beast-man! The club was in his hands, and his thick lips were smeared with grease! Obviously, he had beaten Tige to the hamburger and had gulped it down! Perhaps he had killed Tige!

Adam's first thought was to devour one of his two remaining hamburgers and get out of the picture as rapidly as possible.

But he didn't. He had to think of the girl. He couldn't run away now and leave her here with this . . . this beast!

He opened the remaining packet of hamburgers as rapidly as possible, selected one and pressed it into her hand. Even under the tenseness of the situation, the touch of his fingers against her hand sent a thrill coursing through him.

"Here," he said, "eat this! Quick!"

He knew she didn't understand him. She was backing away from the approaching brute, her whole body trembling. She probably recognized him as one of the horde that was invading her own time-dimension, and was afraid.

The ugly creature was paying no attention to Adam. Its bloodshot eyes were upon the girl, one hand outstretched, club half raised. There was lust in those red eyes. Greed. Hunger.

Adam didn't know how it happened, but he found himself standing between the two, barring the creature's way.

"You can't do this!" his voice grated. "You've got to stop. . . ."

A gnarled hand swept out savagely against Adam's chest. The blow sent him reeling and stumbling backward among loose stones. His injured ankle turned beneath him and he went heavily to the ground, jarring his senses.

Even as he fell, Adam heard the girl's scream of terror. He rolled quickly to one side and pushed himself to a sitting position.

The ape-man had a hairy arm about the girl's slim waist, holding her tightly to him. They were fighting and clawing at each other.

Adam shook his head to clear it, and the hot blood of anger rushed through his veins. His hand came in contact with something. It was a flat stone about the size of a dinner platter. He clutched it firmly and pushed himself to his feet, closing his teeth against the pain in his ankle.

The beast-man's back was to him. Adam couldn't see what the creature was doing to the girl; but he could see the girl's hands striking and clawing, could see her round, green eyes flashing.

It would have been an easy matter for Adam to have crushed the beast's skull from behind with the rock. But he didn't. That was the disadvantage of being too highly civilized; it gave you too many principles to live by.

"Stop that!" shouted Adam. And he clutched the beast-man by a hairy shoulder.

The brute swung around, a snarl on savage, greasy lips.

Adam got a quick glance at the girl. The hamburger was no longer in her hand. Perhaps she had dropped it somewhere.

"Run!" he shouted to her.

Then the beast-man was upon him.

THE first rush sent Adam stumbling backward a few paces. He regained his balance, and fury possessed him. He knew now that he either had to kill or be killed. It was savagery against civilization. It was one time-dimension against another. He and the beast could not exist together with the girl.

All about him was the shadowy outlines of his laboratory, the shadow of civilization. But within his heart was virgin savagery.

He met the beast head on.

Adam knew that his chances of victory were extremely remote, his own strength pitiable against that of the beast. But he hoped that this diversion would give the girl a chance to get away. If something had happened to the whole of the human race in that other time-dimension, if this beast and the girl were the only survivors . . . well, he didn't want the monster to father a new race. . . .

The savage, blood-shot eyes were glaring. The huge club in the gnarled hand was swinging down with pile-driver force toward Adam's head.

Adam knew he could not escape that club; his only hope was to deliver a telling blow simultaneously with the rock platter. With cold, deadly viciousness, he swung the rock at the bestial face.

The club passed down through Adam's skull. It went down through his neck and through his chest. . . .

At the same time, the rock in Adam's hand entered the savage face, went through it and beyond. . . .

The momentum of his blow carried Adam stumbling forward. He regained his balance quickly and wheeled about. The beast-man was behind him! A shadow! *A shadow within a shadowy laboratory!*

QUICK realization flooded through Adam.

"The . . . the hamburger!" he gasped. "He ate the girl's hamburger, and the crystallization of light rays sent him on into my own time-dimension just . . . just as he swung the club!"

The beast-man was still swinging his club. Filled with savage bewilderment at finding himself suddenly imprisoned within four strange walls, he was smashing everything within reach. Chairs disintegrated before the club. The work table buckled in the middle and went down. The great machine rocked and swayed to the assault and began to fall apart. And as the machine crumpled, the shadowy picture of the laboratory faded slowly into nothingness and was gone. The last connecting link had been broken.

The girl was coming toward Adam, her arms outstretched.

He experienced a moment of indecision. There was one remaining hamburger—enough crystallization of light rays to take him back to his own time-dimension where the beast was wrecking the laboratory. But that would leave the girl stranded. Alone!

"I am Adam Harper," Adam said, pointing to himself.

The girl paused at the sound of his voice. Then she pointed to her own person and said something that sounded strangely like "Eve."

That sent hot and cold chills racing through Adam's body. Eve! And his name was Adam! Was it a mere coincidence? Or had all this been predestined? Predestined that he, Adam, should be here with this beautiful girl in this veritable Garden of Eden where rosy apples . . .?

Apples? The word was a question mark in Adam's brain. With the aid of his ray machine, he had tried a hundred times to send impregnated apples into the girl's dimension. Had he succeeded? Did some of these apples contain a crystallization of light rays? There were many of them scattered about the ground. . . .

And then the girl was in his arms, her eyes smiling, her red lips inviting.

And Adam, still looking at the apples, felt the soft warmth of her body against him and knew the ravages of emotion.

Perhaps some of the apples contained the crystallization of light rays that would take them to civilization; perhaps they didn't. Adam felt that he had no control over the situation.

He tried to keep his arm from tightening about the girl. "Eve," he said finally, his voice a husky whisper, "I . . . I think we are going to eat an . . . an apple."

FOR THE BEST IN FANTASY FICTION—FANTASTIC ADVENTURES

THE ORDEAL OF

By NELSON S. BOND

In spite of peace pacts, Earth ships were being attacked on Themis. Could Biggs answer that one?

WELL, like it says in the old adage, "Things equal to the same thing gather no moss."

When the Corporation that underpays us snatched the *Saturn* off the freight shuttle and turned it into a trouble-shooter for special assignments, we thought we were getting a break. Huh! We were. "Break" is just another word for "bust." The result of our alleged "promotion" was that for a fractional increase in salary we worked twice as hard at jobs ten times nastier than any we had ever tackled before.

Like for instance the night Cap Hanson and I—I'm Bert Donovan, bug-pounder of the *Saturn*—were at the home of Lt. and Mrs. Lancelot Biggs. Biggs is, of course, the First Mate of our void-mangling jaloppy. A year ago he married the skipper's daughter, Diane.

We were sitting around, chatting about this and that and the other inconsequential truffle, trying to look calmer than we actually felt, when the telephone jangled. "Bet it's a wrong number!" I said—and picked it up.

I was right. It *was* a Wrong Number named Cheeverly, Assignment Clerk at Long Island Spaceport. He said, "*Salujo,* Sparks. Is Captain Hanson there?"

"Present," I said, "but not accountable for. Listen, Dracula, how about calling back tomorrow or next month?"

He snapped, "This is official business, Donovan! Put him on before I report you!"

So I handed the receiver to the Old Man, and for the next few minutes Diane and Lanse and I eavesdropped upon one of those unintelligible half conversations between Hanson and the drip at the other end of the wire.

"Yeah?" said the Old Man. "Yeah, this is Hanson . . . Eh? Eh, what's that? . . . But Cheeverly, I . . . What? . . . But I'm on furlough, man! The staff and crew of the *Saturn* were granted a three week vaca . . . Oh! Oh, I see! Emergency, eh? Well, if we *have* to. But can't you find some other ship to . . . Mmm-hmmm! I understand. Yes. Yes. Very well. I'll get in touch with my men immediately . . ."

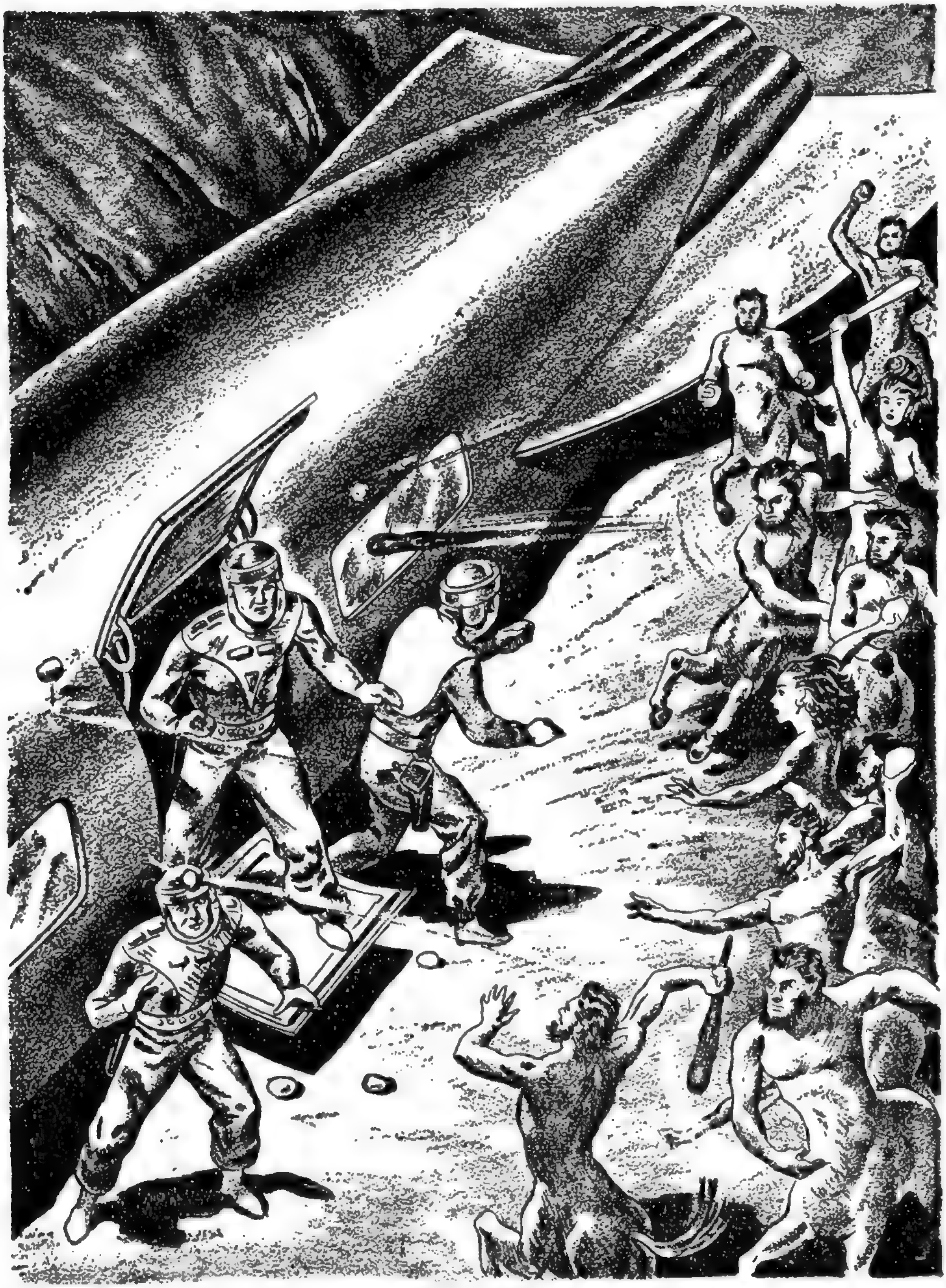
He hung up and turned to us gravely. I think we all knew what he was going to say before he said it. Diane cried, "Oh, *no,* Daddy! No! Not *now!*" And Biggs asked, "What is it, sir? I hope they don't want us to—?"

Hanson fumed, "They do, dingbust 'em to Hades! It's an emergency mission. We're to lift gravs immediately!"

"Lift gravs!" exclaimed Biggs bleakly. His lump of a larynx leaped like a lemon in his scrawny neck. "But, Dad! I can't go *now!*"

His jaw sagged to his wishbone, makhim homelier than usual. And, brother,

LANCELOT BIGGS



We stepped out of the ship—right into a hail of rocks!

that's saying something! Lancelot Biggs is a lot of things. He's a genius, for one, and he's slightly whacky, for another. Also he's one of the grandest friends a guy ever had. But even his doting mother could not honestly call him good looking.

HE'S about as tall as an old-fashioned hatrack, and built along the same general lines. He's got more bumps and knobs on his gangling frame than a hyperthyroid cucumber. Of these assorted protuberances, the most prominent is an Adam's-apple which bulges from his throat like a half-swallowed egg, and jiggles up and down when he's excited like a jitterbug on an innerspring mattress.

He was excited now, and said voice-box was cavorting horribly from N to S and return in non-stop flight.

"I can't go *now!*" he repeated starkly. "Not *now,* of all times, Dad—"

Hanson shook his head regretfully.

"It ain't a case of can or can't, Lancelot. It's a case of *got* to. There's trouble on Themis again."

I said, "Themis—again! You mean another ship—?"

"That's right," nodded the skipper. "Attacked and smashed to smithereens. Not a man left alive. Yes."

"But that's impossible!" I cried. "Only last month the S.S.P. announced that a peace pact had been signed with the Thagwar of Themis. The natives of that satellite agreed to join the Solar Union—"

"Them Themisites," growled the Old Man, "keep their pledges about as good as them Japanese you read about in the hist'ry books. The little yellow squirts the United Nations had to wipe out a couple hundred years ago. This makes the sixth time the Thagwar has signed a peace pact. And it's the sixth time he's broke it. So—"

"So," I said, "we're elected, eh?"

"That's the ticket."

Lanse Biggs' jaw tightened. He said stiffly, "I'm afraid this is one time I shall not be able to obey orders, sir. I—I can't go with you!"

My heart did a flipflop. I understood, and heartily sympathized with Biggs. He wanted to be on Earth right now. Because—well, like a professional grape-farmer, he had raisins of his own.

But I knew what his outright refusal meant. The IPC is a hardboiled corporation. When it issues an order, it expects obedience—or else. If Lanse refused to make this expedition, he would not only lose his rating and his chance to go up for Master's papers—an examination he was planning to take in the very near future—he might also lose his job!

Furthermore—and if this sounds selfish, pardon my sullen accent!—I hated to think of making a truly dangerous trip without Lieutenant Biggs on the bridge. That brilliant wingding has pulled so many bunnies out of the derby, saving our individual and collective necks with such monotonous regularity, that we'd be utterly lost without his assistance.

But I said nothing. After all, this was a question Biggs must decide for himself.

As it turned out, though, it was not I, nor the Old Man, nor Lancelot, who solved the problem. It was Mrs. Biggs. In a calm, decisive voice she said, "But, Lanse, dear—such commotion! Of course you will go!"

"What!" blurted Lanse. "And leave you? Never!"

"Stuff," sniffed Diane, "and nonsense! Stop talking like a cheap play. What earthly good are you doing here? Not a bit! But out *there,* men have died

. . . betrayed by a race of scoundrels. Brave men. Spacemen like yourself. Your duty is plain. You must go. You have no choice."

"B-but—" protested Lanse.

"But," interrupted Diane, "nothing! Now, I'm tired. You boys run along and clean up this little job. I'll be here at home, waiting for you."

Biggs asked apprehensively, "And—and you'll be all right while we're gone? You're sure—"

"Certainly I'll be all right," declared Diane. "Now, lift gravs, sailors! And —good luck!"

SO WE went. It was one hell of a job collecting the *Saturn's* crew. Some of them were miles away, several of them were—well, let's be charitable and say, "unshipshape"—and *all* of them were madder than an alizarin dye at having their leaves cancelled.

But none of them were foolhardy enough to refuse the order. So, to make a long story less so, several hours later the *Saturn* roared from its mooring cradle, all jets blasting. And we were off to Themis.

Well, the planet Saturn is approximately nine hundred million miles from the Sun, and (since it was currently on our side of that central beacon) about 800,000,000 from Earth. In the good old days B.B.—Before Biggs—that would have meant a voyage of weeks. But since our ship was equipped with Lancelot's invention, the V-I (or "velocity-intensifier") unit, which enables spacecraft to attain speeds limited only by the critical velocity of light, we could expect to reach our destination in a trifle more than ten hours.

To forestall cracks from Earthlubber mathematicians who point out that 186,000 x 60 x 60 would give us a cruising speed of almost seven hundred million *m.p.h.,* let me explain that you have to let the hypatomics warm for about five hours before you can cut in the V-I unit. Then the unit has to be switched off at least an hour before you reach your objective so you can decelerate without breaking every bone in your head.

Thus we had a ten hour trip ahead of us. So, as the *Saturn* jogged along outward into space, I sat back and tried to remember everything I'd ever heard about Themis.

It wasn't much. I knew that in 1905, Pickering, the discoverer of Phoebe, had first spotted Saturn's tenth satellite. He had named this tiny body Themis, after the goddess of Law and Order. Which, in view of later events, was a huge and mirthless horselaugh.

Then something queer happened. Themis—disappeared! Yeah, that's right. It got lost! Can you imagine "losing" a cosmic body about 300 miles in diameter? Well, that's exactly what the astronomers of the Bloody Twentieth Century did.

According to their record books, they hunted for it time and time again, but never relocated it. Finally they decided astronomer Pickering must have been sopping up too much *spiritus frumenti* the night he discovered the satellite, and they expunged its name from the records.

Which was, of course, a terrific boner . . . because it was there all the time! It was rediscovered in 1983 by the staff observers of the Goddard Memorial Telescope located in Copernicus Crater on Luna. And in 2031 A. D. it was visited, charted, and claimed in the name of the Interplanetary Union by the Space Patrol rocket *Orestes* on settlement investigation flight. Only nobody went to live there.

FOR one thing, it was too small pickings to bother with. During the

Space Rush of 2030-80, everybody who could beg, borrow or steal a ride on a ship was hightailing it to the more important planets. Venus, Mars, Mercury, the asteroids. Later, the Jovian satellites became popular. Slowly the frontiers pushed farther and farther out from Sol. Until now adventurers were willing to take a squint at any body in space which boasted soil, air, and a modicum of gravity.

So at last, after long years of ignoring them, Earth-men were trying to become palsy-walsy with the Themisites. Oh, yes, Themis had natives. Humanoid aboriginals, not terribly unlike Earth's own children, except that they had four legs instead of two.

But our side wasn't getting anywhere, and in a rush! As the Old Man had said, six times a Patrol party had landed on Themis, and six times signed a peace pact with the ruler, or Thagwar, of that globe. But each time the pact had been ignored by the Themisites as soon as a party of colonists attempted to land. The defenseless cruise-ships had been set upon, destroyed, their cargoes stolen, and their passengers brutally slaughtered!

So now here we were, blithely barging in where sensible angels might justifiably hesitate to tread. It didn't make sense. I asked the skipper about it.

"Look, Cap," I demanded, "maybe I'm sort of slow on the intake, but how come *we* draw this assignment? Since the Themisites seem to want trouble, how come the Space Patrol doesn't go busting out there with rotors primed and a couple battalions to occupy the world?"

"On account," explained Hanson impatiently, "Themis is populated by a race with an intelligence quotient of more than .7 on the Solar Constant scale, Sparks. And also because the race has a recognized form of government.

"Accordin' to interplanetary law, colonization of civilized bodies can only be carried out with the permission of the native inhabitants, and aggressive occupation is forbidden when those inhabitants possess humanoid intelligence."

"Meaning," I asked, "what? We aren't allowed to grab Themis unless the Themisites let us?"

"Meanin'," snorted the Old Man, "that if you was the only inhabitant of Themis, the S.S.P. wouldn't have nothin' to worry about. But the hell with that. I didn't come here to bandage words with you. I come up to ask you if you happened to notice the funny way Lanse is actin'."

I had. I noddedly sombrely.

"Moping around," I acknowledged, "like a biddie on a china egg. But you can't expect anything different, Skipper. After all, he didn't want to leave Diane at a time like this."

"Of course not. Neither did I. But since we had to, we might as well buckle down and get the job tooken care of as quick as possible. Anyway, you're keepin' in touch with home, ain't you?"

"Absolutely. Holding an open circuit every minute. But don't worry about Biggs, Skipper. He'll be all right as soon as we actually get to work."

THAT'S as far as I got with my Pollyanna glad-talk. For at that moment the intercommunicating system rasped into life, and in the reflector appeared the baffled pan of Dick Todd, our Second Mate. Dick was so nervous he had to lick his lips three times before he could grease out a word. At last:

"S-s-skipper!" he managed.

"Yeah? What is it?"

"Th-th-themis! We're pulling into Themis—"

The Old Man glanced at his chronometer and nodded.

"O.Q. So we're dropping gravs on schedule? So?"

"N-n-nothing," gulped Todd, "except that Themis has d-d-disappeared! The automatic alarm system is going crazy. According to it, there's a large cosmic body right in front of us—*but we can't see a thing!*"

I SAID, "Oh-oh!" and groped for my transmitter key. But before I could start pounding the bug, Hanson grabbed my wrist.

"And just what do you think *you're* doing, Sparks?"

"I don't *think,*" I told him, "I *know!* When people see things that aren't there, I know what to do. Hide the bottle. But when they start *not* seeing things that *are* there, that's all, folks! I'm calling the S.S.P. base on Luna and asking them to rush a hospital ship out this way, immediately if not sooner. A nice, pretty hospital ship equipped with soft, hemstitched straitjackets—"

"Don't be a dope," roared the Old Man. "Todd don't talk nonsense for no good reason. There's something screwy goin' on around here. I want to know what it is. Come on!"

And he galloped from my turret like a bolt of goosed lightning, hauling me along in his wake by sheer suction. We hightailed it through the corridors, up the ramp, and onto the bridge. There we found both Todd and Biggs. Todd was still a delicate shade of bilious green, but he was hunched over the plot table, scribbling hurried calculations. Biggs was in the pilot's bucket seat, punching away at the studs as cheerfully as if this were a routine test flight in home atmo.

He glanced around as we came in, and his eyes popped out on stalks. He half rose from his seat.

"A—a message, Sparks?" he quavered.

I shook my head.

"No word yet," I reassured him. "I'll let you know. Meanwhile, what's the trouble around here?"

"Trouble?" repeated Lancelot wonderingly.

The Old Man groaned and pawed at what little remains of his hair.

"Don't look now," he rasped, "but didn't Todd call me a couple of minutes ago with some wild-and-woolly tale about Themis disappearing?"

"Oh—*that!*" smiled Biggs gently. "I thought for a second you meant there was something wrong. Why, yes, Dad. Themis *has* disappeared—temporarily. Oddest thing—"

"Talk sense!" I moaned. "Todd said something about there being a large body in our path, too. Did it—" I took a look at the central vision plate which reflected nothing between us and the far stars—"did it go away?"

"Oh, no," drawled Biggs nonchalantly. "It's still there."

"Still there!" I looked again, more closely, at the vision plate. It was as bare as a debutante's backbone at a ball. "What's still *where,* Lanse? Have you gone off your gravs, or are my optics myopic?"

"The large body," said Biggs blandly. "It's Themis' moon. It's there. Three points to starboard, and one degree to loft."

"Themis' *moon!*" croaked the Old Man. "What in Hades are you talkin' about, Lancelot! Themis *is* a moon!"

"I know," agreed Biggs. His larynx bobbled pleasantly. "That's the curious part of it. This is the first time in the solar system that any satellite has ever been found to have a satellite of its own! But we've located it, charted its trajectory, and cross-checked our calculations—haven't we, Dick?"

Todd looked up from the plot table.

"That's right," he said hollowly. "Themis *has* got a moon of its own. An—an invisible moon!"

"Invisible moon!" The skipper and I did a twin act.

"Yes," said Biggs. "You know, I believe that's why Themis—er—'disappears' periodically. It is circled by a large, opaque satellite with the peculiar property of being able to bend light waves around itself. Consequently, every time the moon, revolving around its primary, comes between Themis and observers, Themis is occulted—and disappears!"

THE Old Man looked at him like he had just grown a second head.

"B-but that's impossible, son!" he gasped.

"Oh, no," said Lanse quietly. "Unlikely, yes. But not impossible. Because—well, because the situation *does* exist, you see." He clucked thoughtfully. "Strange, isn't it, that we should be the first to find it out? After these many years. But that's the Laws of Chance for you. Every other time a ship visited Themis, the invisible moon must have been on the far side."

Hanson was fidgeting like he had wasps in his weskit. Now he broke in, "That's all very interestin'! But how about the chances of our crackin' up on this aforesaid moon-of-a-moon?"

"Oh," replied Biggs negligently, "that's all taken care of. We've plotted a new trajectory around it. We should see Themis again in a moment—Aaah!" He breathed a sigh of satisfaction. "There she is! Nice looking little satellite, isn't it!"

And true enough, Themis was beginning to appear in the vision plate before us. A weird looking sight it was. A thin sliver of terrain at first . . . then widening, growing into a full sized cosmic body as it stopped being occulted by its phenomenal little companion.

Biggs punched the intercommunicating stud and spoke to the engine room.

"All right, Mac," he called. "You can cut the V-I. Prepare to land in about fifty minutes." Then he turned to us again. "Remarkable thing, what? Some day when we're not so busy we'll have to drop jets on that invisible moon, eh? Should be an interesting visit to make."

The skipper groaned feebly.

"Interestin'! He finds an invisible moon, figures a trajectory around it, then says it's—Oooh! Let me out of here! I'm feelin' heat-waves!"

I grinned at him consolingly.

"Cheer up," I told him. "I know just how you feel. Only it's not the heat . . . it's the humility."

So that was that. The next hour was taken up with routine stuff. Decelerating to atmo velocity, cruising over Themis until we located the capital city of Kraalbur, where the Thagwar maintained his royal residence, dropping to a stern-jet landing . . . that was all child's play for a spaceman like Lt. Lancelot Biggs.

THUS it was that a short while later, armed to the teeth and ready for any eventuality, our foray party of ten men stood in the lock of the *Saturn*, listening to Hanson's final instructions.

"Be quiet," he advised us, "be calm . . . but above all, be careful. These Themisites is as untrustworthy as three-of-a-kind in a gamblin' joint. Our orders is to improve relations, not make 'em worse . . . so act accordin'ly. We'll treat them exactly like they meet us. If they greet us friendly, we'll be nice. But if they get tough—"

"Well?" asked one of the crew.

"Give 'em the works!" said the Old Man succinctly, and nodded to his son-in-law. "O.Q., Lanse. Open up!"

The airlock wheezed asthmatically, and we stepped out upon the soil of the satellite Themis.

A huge mob of natives had gathered around to greet us. They were a weird looking outfit. Sort of like men on horses, you might say, or like those old Centaurs you read about in mythology books. Maybe that's where the legend of Centaurs originated; I don't know. The more man travels the spaceways, the more he discovers races of beings similar to the freaks and curiosities recorded in ancient myths. Lanse Biggs believes that once upon a time, thousands of years ago, before Earth's old moon crashed, destroying the civilization then existent, Man knew the secret of spacetravel, and legend is a record of things once seen and known. But I wouldn't know about that. I'm just a radioman. . . .

Anyhow, these Themisites were sort of like us down to the tummy. But from there on they branched out into the equine family, being endowed with strong, muscular, quadrupedal bodies and postscripted with long, bushy tails.

But they were intelligent. No doubt about that. And surprisingly enough, they seemed friendly! One, their ruler, trotted forward and raised an arm in the cosmoswide gesture of greeting. He addressed us in Universale, the common language of space.

"Salujo, amiji!" he said. "Welcome to Themis, land of peace and brotherly love!"

Hanson gasped, "Get a load of that! Three days ago the four-legged punks murdered a whole crew of Earthmen, and now they yap about brotherly—"

"Maybe he's right?" I suggested thoughtfully. "You ever have a brother, Skipper?"

"Shhh!" whispered Biggs. He stepped forward, acting as spokesman for our team. "Greetings, O Thagwar of Themis! We come as emissaries from the Blue World, seeking to forge a bond of friendship between your people and ours."

"Friendship and peace," said the Thagwar grandiloquently, "are ever the desire of my race."

Lanse said, "We hear and believe, noble Thagwar. But evil tidings have lately reached our ears. It is told that a few days ago you led your people in mortal combat against a party from our planet—"

THE Thagwar drew himself stiffly erect and shook his head in firm denial.

"That," he said in a tone of outraged dignity, "is not so! It was the *old* Thagwar who led that brutal assault."

"Old Thagwar? Then you have overthrown his government since—?"

"The former Thagwar," informed the Themisite leader, "has been removed from power. *I* am now Thagwar of Themis. I wish only friendship and peace between our peoples. And now," his eyes rolled hopefully, "have you brought the usual—er—tributes?"

"Tributes," of course, meant graft. Humanoid forms change with the planets, but human nature doesn't. However, we had come prepared, knowing the mentalities of our opponents. Lanse beckoned to a pair of our crewsmen who lugged forward a crate packed with an assortment of the doolallies and thingamajiggers loved by abos like the Themisites. Mirrors, gaudy bits of costume jewelry, brightly-colored trinkets, yards of richly hued cloth, horn-rimmed spectacles, cheap cameras . . . all that sort of thing.

Crooked? Sure. Taking advantage of ignorant savages? Posilutely. But, hell, you can't interest uncultured aborigines in vanRensaeller atomo-converters and pre-Rooseveltian Era art treasures. Of course they'd be glad to get their paws on a few Haemholtz ray-pistols or a case of three-star *tekel*, but the authorities frown on the practice of supplying lower races with firearms, fireworks or firewater.

So Lanse handed out the gadgets to the Thagwar, who beamed with delight. And after that the negotiations were a snapperoo. We told what we wanted: permission for Earth's colonists to settle on Themis, the right to construct spaceports, and so on and so forth . . . and the ruler said, "Yes . . . yes . . . yes," till he sounded like a phonograph needle caught in a worn groove.

There remained but one thing to be done. The formal signing of the treaty. So Lanse drew from his pocket the previously prepared sheets, and was just getting ready to help the Thagwar scrawl a legal "X" on the dotted line when a stir passed through the assemblage.

IT WAS a nervousness, a jitteriness, you could *feel!* Heads craned upward to look at the sky, hooves pawed restlessly at the turf. And one by one, the centaurlike denizens of Themis began drifting away, cantering back toward the cluster of hovels which was their capital city.

Even the Thagwar seemed hesitant, uncertain. For a few minutes he tried to carry on like a bold, brave monarch. Then with a little whimper that sounded almost like a whinny, he picked up his bundle of loot and galloped away, too.

Cap Hanson's jaw dropped like a wildcat stock in a bear market.

"Well, I'll be!" he choked. "Now what?"

But Biggs had been studying the sky. Now he frowned.

"Night," he said.

"Eh?"

"Night," repeated Lanse, "or what passes for night on this peculiar little satellite. You see, Themis doesn't revolve on its axis, therefore it has no night or daytime as we on Earth know those periods. And, of course, since it travels about its primary so swiftly, and since Saturn itself emits so strong a *gegenschein,* occultation by the mother planet doesn't create perfect darkness.

"But Themis' invisible little companion swings about Themis. And whenever it comes between this world and the Sun a dark period ensues. I should judge we are about to experience one right now. Yes—see? It is beginning to get dark."

"You mean," stormed Hanson, "everything's called off on account of darkness? The pact ain't goin' to be signed?"

"Apparently not," admitted Lanse ruefully. "Almost all aboriginal races have a deep dread of darkness, you know. Well—"

He shrugged—"there's no sense in our waiting out here until the 'night' period ends. We might as well go back to the ship and be comfortable."

So we did.

Fortunately, the phony "night" didn't last long. Fortunately for me, I mean. Because as soon as we got to the ship, Lanse pranced along with me up to the radio turret, and there pestered the living bejabbers out of me to try to get some word from Earth. But that was strictly no go. My audio was humming like a tenor in a tepid shower. Static galore.

But at last the invisible barrier cutting us off from Sol's light slipped away, and once again we marched out onto the soil of Themis.

Marched out? Huh! This time we sauntered out. We were feeling very carefree and confident, you see, that everything was hunky-dory. Why not? We had been on the verge of signing the new peace pact when darkness interrupted us. . . .

That blind, trusting confidence almost cost us our lives! The Themisites were again gathered around our ship. But when we stepped from the airlock—we stepped out into a hail of lethal fury!

IT WAS a good break for us that the Themisites had no modern weapons. A couple of Haemholtz pistols in the paws of capable users, or even one .54 millimetre rotor, and yours truly wouldn't be here to chronicle the ensuing events.

But the four-legged scoundrels' armaments were fortunately on the barbaric side. Stones and cudgels, crudely forged spears, incompetently carven bows and arrows that were as inaccurate as a real estate agent's descriptions . . . these were the weapons with which we were assailed.

Cap Hanson caught a nice sized chunk of rock amidships, and one of the crewmen had his shoulder opened up by a wobbling spear, but those were our only casualties. Above the hubbub and furore—the Themisites were howling like a mob of unleashed demons—Lanse cried, *"Back into the ship, quickly!"*

Which was a command requiring no repeat performance. For the next three seconds the airlock port looked like Bargain Day at the Girdle Counter. Then we were all inside once more, safe at home but sore as a student equestrian's coccyx.

The Old Man bellowed, "Unlatch the rotors! Treacherous villains, I'll learn 'em to attack Earthmen! We'll blast them clean off the face of their nasty, sneakin' little globe, the good-for-nothin' horses—"

But Lanse said, "No, Dad—please! Wait a while!"

"Wait? What for?"

"There's something distinctly unusual about this," pondered Lancelot gravely. "A few hours ago they were friendly; now they are screaming for our blood. I don't understand it. But you know my motto: *'Get the theory first!'* If I can learn *why* they changed so abruptly—"

"What difference does it make why they changed? They did, didn't they? That's all that counts—"

"No, Dad. The important thing is not to overwhelm the Themisites, beat them into submission. It is to settle our differences for all time, establish an enduring peace—" He turned to me—"Sparks, get on the wire, will you? I want a complete report from Earth on the previous peace treaties signed with Themis. Who signed them . . . when . . . under what circumstances . . . everything we can learn."

"O.Q.," I said. "It's your business. But my money bets on the Skipper's plan. 'Civilize 'em with a gun' is *my* motto."

Biggs shook his ungainly head disapprovingly.

"That form of reasoning," he declared, "died with the dictatorships. Now, get on the key, Sparks. And, oh—while you're at it, see if there's any news from Diane, will you?"

He was a very anxious looking gent. And no wonder.

WELL, after that tempus fidgeted, as it has a habit of doing. The static had cleared, and I established contact with Joe Marlowe at Lunar III. He said he'd try to scare up the info I wanted, but it might take time. I told him to go ahead; I had more time on my hands than a professional watch repairer. So we dillied and dallied, and after while back he came, loaded with more facts than Mr. Britannica put in his encyclopedia.

The Themis situation, it seemed, was plenty complex. The first peace pact had been signed eight months ago between the Thagwar of Themis and the Solar Space Cruiser, *Ajax,* Col. A. R. Prentiss commanding. Swell! Only two weeks later the Themisites had murdered in cold blood an agent sent there by the Cosmic Corporation to set up a trading post!

The S.S.P. had sent a second expedition. This party reported hostile reception. Then, after a whole day wasted in attempting to get in touch with the Thagwar, the Themisites had suddenly turned friendly—and signed a second treaty.

This one had lasted exactly four days. It was busted when the quadrupeds dittoed the craniums of a party of miners who dropped gravs for fresh water supplies!

Why go on? Expeditions Three, Four, Five and Six had all followed the same pattern . . . an agreeable understanding followed by a swift kick in the nose. Our experience was no novelty; we were just number Seven on the Themisite hit-and-run parade.

"In view of the circumstances," Joe Marlowe wound up his report, "the authorities here suggest that Captain Hanson get the situation in hand and get the situation in hand and get the situation in hand and get the situation—"

I cut in on him—but quick!

"Hold everything!" I shot back. "Let's play like he now has the situation in hand. What happens next?"

"Let him contact the Thagwar of Themis," bugged Marlowe, "and contact the Thagwar of Themis and contact the Thagwar of Themis and contact—"

Biggs was in the turret with me. He can read code almost as well as I can. He stared at me curiously.

"What's the matter, Sparks?"

"Don't ask me," I retorted. "I only work here. It sounds like Marlowe's developed a bad case of digital hiccups! Oh, well, we've got the information we wanted, anyhow. I'll sign off." So I did.

Biggs asked, "And—and Diane?"

"No word yet. Joe will let us know. The circuit's still open. Well, you've heard the report. What do you make of it?"

Biggs said slowly, "I don't know, Sparks. It's very peculiar. I'll have to think it over—*Yes? What is it?"*

He spoke this last to the wall audio which had come to life. Cap Hanson answered from the bridge.

"Lanse, are you there, son? Listen, come up to the bridge right away, will you?"

Swift apprehension tightened Biggs' features.

"What's the matter? The Themisites getting violent? They're not attacking the ship?"

Hanson groaned like the guest artist at a seance.

"Just the opposite! Another of them phony 'nights' has passed outside since you two've been fiddlin' around up there. Now it's daylight again . . . and there's a mob of Themisites gathered around outside . . . *wavin' banners and peltin' the* Saturn *with flowers!* The Thagwar has just sent a messenger biddin' us friendly welcome to Themis!"

"GREAT growling guttersnipes!" I spluttered, "What's this all about? One minute they want to kill and boo . . . the next they want to bill and coo! Why don't they make up their minds?"

"Probably," decided the skipper, "because they ain't got none. Lanse—?"

"We can't learn anything," said Biggs quietly, "in here. Let's go outside."

So for the third time in as many Themisian 'days', out we pranced, to be greeted by such hooraw and ballyhoo as you never saw. Those same centaurs who, a few short Earthly hours ago had been aiming lethal presents at our kissers were now aiming kisses at our presence! Their leader pranced forward gracefully and made a low bow before Cap Hanson.

"Greetings, Oh child of the Blue World!" he intoned. "As Thagwar of Themis I bid you welcome to our peace-loving little planet—"

"Th-thanks!" said the Old Man, and looked bewildered. "Lanse, son, suppose you—?"

But Lanse was staring curiously at the speaker. He nudged me and whispered, "Sparks, study the Thagwar! Do you notice anything . . . well . . . *strange* about him?"

"Sure!" I assented. "He looks like a veterinarian's mistake; is that what you mean? If it's the color of his eyes you're worrying about, you'd better ask somebody else. These Themisites all look the same to me. Like peas from the same pot."

"That's not what I meant," whispered Biggs. "What strikes me as being odd is that . . . remember how proud he was of those ornaments we gave him before the 'night' period set in? He had himself all decked out like a Christmas tree. But now look at him! Not a single decoration!"

"Maybe," I suggested, "he's allergic to tin?"

"And on the other hand," mused Biggs, "*that* Themisite over there is wearing a bracelet and a brass curtain rod in his nose—"

He was perfectly right. The big boss of Themis was as barren of trinkets as a Pilgrim father. But standing in the background was one of his henchmen glittering like gilt on a joy-joint bar! It was whacky. The Thagwar didn't look to me like the kind of guy—or hoss—who would donate his "tribute" to a subject.

"There's something fishy about this," I said. "Ask him how come, Lanse . . . just for the halibut."

"I will," said Biggs, and stepped forward to do so. But before he could pop the question, the Thagwar spoke up.

"Peace," he said hoarsely—no pun intended, pals! Lay down them bricks! —"Peace between your people and mine. And now—did you bring the usual tribute?"

"Usual tribute!" repeated the Old Man starkly. "Of course we did! We give it to you yesterday, you rascally old scoundrel. What's the big idea of—?"

The Thagwar's eyes darkened, and he pawed the ground fretfully.

"That is a mistake, Earthman! You gave me nothing!"

"Wha-a-at! A whole darn caseful of—"

"You gave me," repeated the Thagwar with increasing ominousness, "nothing! You offered a few baubles to the *old* Thagwar, possibly—"

Cap Hanson groaned and turned agonized eyes to his son-in-law. "Ain't that something, now! Another revolution! Now we got to pay off twice!"

Lanse nodded soberly.

"I suspected something like that. Yes, I'm afraid we must, Dad. Tomkins . . . Splicer . . ."

HE CALLED to two of the crew. So we had to do it again. Go through the same old rigmarole. I'll spare you the details this time, since they were the same as before. We donated, the Thagwar accepted, then we started talking peace-terms. The pact was presented, the Thagwar studied it and this time—fortunately—succeeded in stamping it with his official O.Q. before Themis' invisible moon brought night again.

So at last our job was accomplished. As we entered the ship, Cap Hanson was jubilant.

"Thank goodness *that's* done!" he sighed happily. "And now—back to Earth! And Diane—"

Biggs' Adam's-apple bobbled convulsively in his lean throat. "I—er—I think we'd better wait just a little while longer, Dad," he said mildly.

"Wait? What for? We got the peace pact signed."

"I know. But don't forget, that's only the eighth in a long series of such 'peace pacts.' We'd better stick around a little while and see if they live up to it."

"Stick around a while! How long?"

Lanse glanced through the quartzite viewpanes and said, "Not long. Because—see? It's night again."

"Night! What's night got to do with it?"

"That," said Lanse seriously, "is just what *I* want to know. If I could only get the theory straight in my mind I might have the answer. Sparks—" He turned to me—"turn on the telaudio. Let's see if we can't get some word—"

So I did, but there was nothing cooking. The circuit was as cold as a divorcee's kiss. And that was bad, because Biggs was growing nervouser and nervouser by the minute. He wanted to get back to Earth so bad he could taste it. But that's Biggs for you. Thorough and painstaking if he undertakes a thing. And he wasn't going to leave Themis until he knew this situation was completely cleared up.

But at last the darkness outside began to lift, and Cap Hanson fidgeted.

"Well, here's what you were waitin' for, boy. Now what?"

"Now," said Biggs, "we see what happens. Are they coming back from their city?"

They were. The Themisites were galloping across the plains toward the *Saturn* again. They were the romping, roamingest bunch of mavericks I ever saw. "Yup!" I said.

"And—and their attitude?"

"Friendly, of course!" snorted the skipper. "Why shouldn't they be? Didn't we just sign a peace treaty with them? Lanse, I don't know what's ailin' you! You—"

He never finished his denunciation of Biggs. For at that moment the oncoming Themisites hove within hurling distance—and started hurling! Only this time it was not, as it had been a short while before, flowers. This time their expressions of "everlasting peace and affection" were offered with—*stones, arrows, and spears!*

WELL, Hanson's roar of rage threatened to lift the top clean off the control turret.

"Dastards!" he screamed. "Vandals, murderers and things that rhyme with what I first called 'em! This is all I'm goin' to take from them four-legged scoundrels. Call up the men, Sparks! Tell 'em to man the guns! We're goin' to blast them murderin' skunks from here to Kingdom Come—"

"Wait, Dad!" pleaded Biggs feverishly. "I think I'm beginning to understand—faintly. If you'll give me just a little more time—"

"Time your Aunt Nellie! I've done all the delayin' I'm goin' to—"

It was at that moment the telaudio, which I had set to vocode any message which came in on the Luna circuit, began squawking. It was faint at first, and sort of garbled, with lots of static, but it cleared as it went along.

"Lieutenant Lancelot Biggs," it called, "aboard the *Saturn*—congratulations! You are the father of a fine baby boy!"

"B-b-b-boy!" gasped Biggs. His face turned every color in the spectrum, and a couple that haven't been invented yet. "A—a boy!"

"Yippee!" howled the Old Man, his thoughts of vengeance on the Themisites temporarily forgotten. "A grandson! I'm a grampaw! *Yippee!"*

"Congratulations, Lanse!" I said. "A boy, eh? Swell! Another Biggs in space, one of these days—"

"S-s-see if you can get Earth, Sparks," chattered Biggs. "F-f-find out how Diane is."

"Right!" I snapped. "I'll get at it immediately."

I started for the radio room. But before I had taken two steps the audio began talking again.

"Lieutenant Lancelot Biggs," it called, "aboard the *Saturn*—congratulations! You are the father of a fine baby boy!"

My face sort of blanched. I turned to Biggs. "Congratulations," I offered, "again, Lanse! Golly—*two* boys!"

Hanson demanded, "Whaddya mean, two boys! That's a repeat message, you dope!"

Lanse smiled sort of feebly.

"I—I'm afraid not, Dad," he said. "If it were a repeat message, Marlowe would have said, 'Repeat.' Sparks is right. I—I'm the father of twins!"

"Well, I'll be darned!" ejaculated the Old Man. Then, rallying, "Twins, eh? Good! That makes me *two* grampaws, eh? Fine! I'm twice as gla—"

He stopped, his jaw dropping strickenly. For again Joe Marlowe's voice was rolling through the control turret.

"Lieutenant Lancelot Biggs," it called, "aboard the *Saturn*—congratulations! You are the father of a fine baby boy—"

"G-g-gracious!" gasped Biggs, and fell into a chair. *"Triplets!"*

THIS time I addressed myself to Hanson. "Congratulations, Skipper," I said. "Now you're *three* grampaws. If Diane keeps *this* up, you'll be able to man a whole cruiser."

The Old Man's face was fiery.

"Now, hold everything!" he stormed. "This is goin' too far! Diane don't have to overdo it, just because we're not there! There's such a thing as—*Triplets!* I won't allow it!"

"What's the matter," I grinned at him, "afraid of the Three Little Biggs, Skipper. Don't be a big bad wolf!"

But even *I* didn't think it was funny when, at that moment, Joe Marlowe's familiar tones rolled through the room *again*.

"Lieutenant Lancelot Biggs," he called, "aboard the *Saturn*—congratulations! You are the father of a fine baby boy—"

"Gosh!" I gulped. "This is turning into a parade!"

Cap Hanson's face was a study in technicolor. His jowls were dangling to his third weskit button. But oddly enough, at this third dire pronouncement, Lancelot Biggs did not even wince. Instead, his eyes brightened; he rose from the chair into which, a moment before, he had tumbled.

"No!" he yelled. "Not a parade—a solution!"

"Huh?" I gaped at him. "Solution to what? The unemployment problem?"

"No, Sparks! All our troubles! Quadruplets? No! Triplets? No! Twins? No, not even that! Just one baby!"

"Y-you mean," I asked him, "that's a repeat message? But, Lanse, you know as well as I do Joe would have announced it as a repeat—"

"Certainly. But what we're hearing is the same message over and over again!"

"Huh!" Hanson forced the query, new hope in every wrinkle of his brow.

"Yes. Remember how Marlowe's orders got grooved before, Sparks? Well, this is some more of the same thing! I know *why,* too. And I *also* know why we've been having so much trouble with the Themisites!"

"Y-you do? Why?"

"The moon! The invisible moon—that's the answer! Tell me, Sparks—what sort of things are invisible?"

"Why?" I stammered, "dark things seen against a dark background . . . light things seen against a light background . . . objects marked with protective coloration . . ."

"And *transparent* things!" chortled Biggs. "Transparent things with just sufficient mass to cause refraction of light! That's what Themis' moon is made of! Pure, unadulterated galena in its natural form is a colorless, transparent substance, sufficiently opaque to occult Themis, but also with enough mass to refract normal light rays! And galena is—"

"I get it!" I hollered. "A natural wave-trap for radio transmission. Back in the early days of the Twentieth Century, galena was the substance used in the manufacture of experimental so-called 'crystal sets'!"

"By golly, you're right, Lanse! That satellite is large enough to capture and retain a record of Joe Marlowe's voice, and as it revolves it keeps re-transmitting it to us over and over again—"

"Lieutenant Lancelot Biggs," repeated the voice of Marlowe—"aboard the *Saturn*—congratulations! You are the father of a fine baby boy!"

"—like that!" said Biggs. "Yes! Notice how Joe's voice always catches a little just before he says 'congratulations'? It's been the same fault every time."

"O.Q.," broke in the Old Man. "Maybe you're right. You usually are. But what's that got to do with the way the Themisites keeps changin' their attitude towards us? Don't tell me they got galena in their veins?"

BIGGS shook his head firmly.

"No, that's another question entirely. But it can be solved by the same theory."

"Huh?"

"Twins!" said Biggs. "Or, rather, multiple rulers! Sparks, you said you couldn't tell the difference between one Themisite and another—"

"That's right."

"Neither can I. Neither can any Earthman. That's why we've been unable to understand their psychology and—more important still—their form of government."

"Government!" burst in the Old Man. "Now he talks about government. What's that got to do with—"

"Why," explained Lancelot, "everything! The Themisites have one of the rarest forms of self-rule known. But one which early in the Greek civilization had its counterpart on earth. You see, they are an *omnigarchy!*"

"A who-ni-whichy?" I choked.

"Omnigarchy! From the Latin base

'omni-', meaning all! You see, on this world—everyone takes his turn at being Thagwar! Every day a new Themisite becomes master over his brethren until the next 'night' period. That is why the Thagwar we signed our pact with today denied having received any gifts. He told the truth. We had given our tributes to the Thagwar of the preceding day.

"That is—must be!—also why peace pacts have been broken with such regularity. Each succeeding Thagwar feels he, being now ruler, is entitled to a share of the 'spoils' that go with the signing of a treaty—and being not obligated to uphold the signature of a deposed Thagwar leads a movement against colonists in an effort to win his rights. The individual natures of these Thagwars dictates the form of movement. If the Thagwar is a naturally peace-loving creature he comes with soft words and flowers; if he is a brutal type, he attempts to take his tribute by force."

I demanded wildly, "But—but how the dickens are we ever going to form a permanent treaty with a race that changes rulers once a day? Especially when a Themisian day is only a couple of Earth hours?"

Biggs shrugged. "That," he declaimed, "is not our problem, but that of the Interplanetary Union. My private opinion is that, since Themis has a limited population, the best way to assure peace would be to buy over every single Themisite. Of course, that means a terrific initial expenditure, but—"

"But," said the Old Man, "we've done what we was sent here for. We signed a peace pact—which ain't worth the paper it's printed on—and we found out why all former treaties was failures. So if you ask me, the best thing we can do is git out of here before one of them periodic Thagwars, smarter than the rest, discovers a way to wreck our ship. What say, son?"

"That," nodded Biggs, "would be my idea, too. Our task is finished; we'll leave it to the Space Patrolmen to figure out the rest. Come on, Dad—let's lift gravs for home and Lancelot, Junior!"

"For Lance—!" The Old Man frowned. "Oh, no! No more silly names like that in our family. That young man's name is gonna be Waldemar—after me!"

"Lancelot!" said Lancelot stubbornly.

"Waldemar!" said Waldemar Hanson the same way.

"Lancelot!"

"Waldemar!"

SO WE all went home and met Christopher Biggs. Only trouble with those two shipmates of mine is that they forgot Diane Hanson, who, being the daughter of Waldemar and the wife of Lancelot, has a stubborn streak of her own.

Kit Biggs weighed seven pounds and eight ounces. He and his mother are both doing fine, thanks. Biggs is doing O.Q., too. He's got a new title now. Around his home, that is. He's First Mate in Charge of the Three-Cornered Pants Department.

But—what do you expect? After all, life is just one damp thing after another. . . .

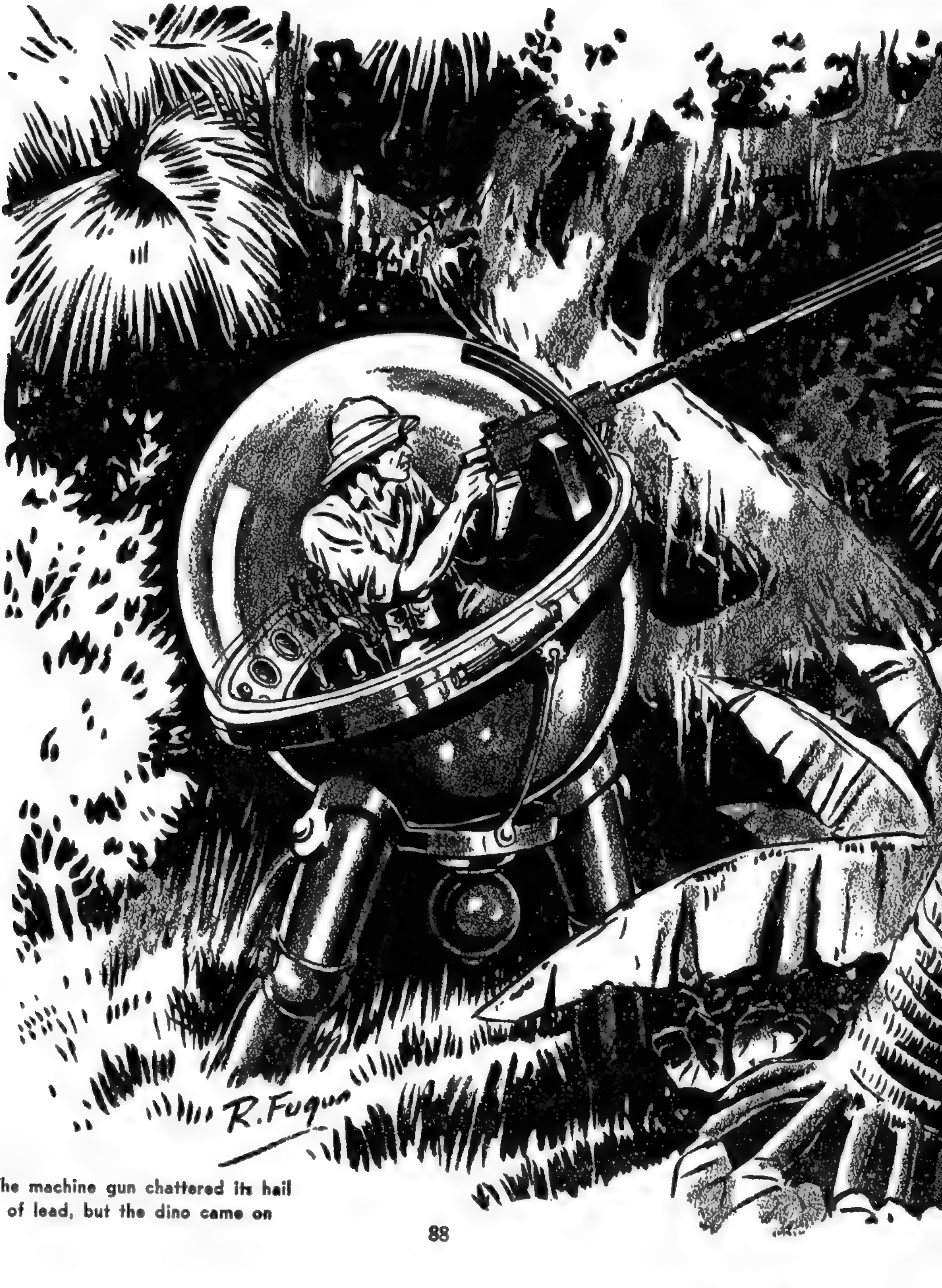
THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

"FLIGHT OF THE SIRIUS," by P. F. Costello

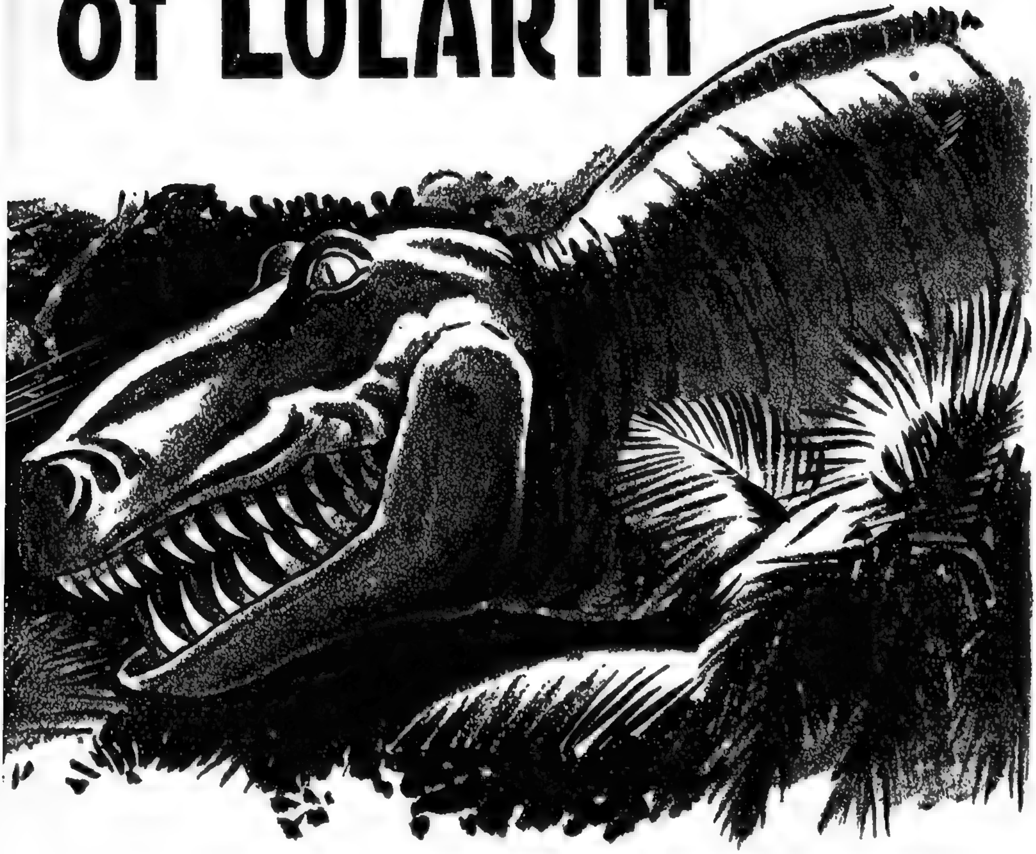
A Thrilling Short Story of an Unusual Space Voyage

WARRIOR QUEEN



The machine gun chattered its hail of lead, but the dino came on

# of LOLARTH



By ROSS ROCKLYNNE

Captain Burke Donlevy thought that no hell could be worse than the war until he landed in weird Lolarth!

THE GERMANS had drawn up their 75s, filched from the Maginot Line at the beginning of the war, and were pounding the invasion front around Dieppe, playing hell with American tanks.

Captain Burke Donlevy thought he at last knew what hell was. He had missed Dunkirk, and the first Dieppe invasion, but he was certain they could not have been worse than this. Red fire burned the air for miles around, and great diseased oranges burst with mind-cracking detonation.

He hugged the ground, burying his sweating face in his arms as the scream of an approaching shell sounded.

It struck.

Dirt, cold and foul; arms; legs; heads; the whole bodies of what had been his command, rained down on him.

A quiet madness grew in his brain as he looked around. Off there some distance, men with bayonets, running men who would have savage, hating looks on their mud-caked faces, were advancing over the shell-pitted ground. There were big holes in their ranks.

He wondered if this invasion effort would succeed. He wondered if his brother American officers would die.

There was a great weariness in him. His bare hands clawed into the ground, clawed inches deep into the mud. He wondered why he didn't want to get up, to charge toward the enemy, to avenge the horrible, futile death of those young boys who had been in his command. Dead. And he was just content to lie here, and go mad with the thought of the death and the suffering that struck everywhere across the world.

His mind was so dull and stupid that he could not even think how fortunate it had been that out of the whole company he alone had not been hit. All he could think of was Jamie Sutherland's letter, which he had received that morning from his orderly. . . .

> Dearest One (it had read):
>
> I can't be cheerful. I've tried, Burke, dear. Not with you in Ireland, and liable to go across any minute. Not when I might receive word any day that something terrible has happened. Not when this terrible war is destroying all the love in the world, and we're losing so many islands and cities and bases and everything seems to be going against us. I keep thinking about how happy we were on your furlough Christmas, when you showed me your captain's stripes. . . .

"Don't worry, Jamie," Burke Donlevy had thought, then. "Nothing's going to happen to me. Sure, they're opening up a second front tomorrow, and I'm going across with the rest of the boys, but we'll bash in the Huns' ugly pusses and we'll drink beer on the Wilhelmstrasse first of next month—just in time to send our bills."

JAMIE had finished:

> But I'll keep my chin up, Burke, dear, as you would advise me, and of course you'll be back soon. I'm keeping your house in perfect order, and though it is a little eerie to stay there all by myself, I always remember that someday we'll live there as man and wife.
>
> The new butler-caretaker — I guess you'd call him a factotum? —seems to fill the bill. He seems to be a very efficient person. Don't you think it's strange that he applied to me for the position on the very day your other man was killed in that terrible automobile accident? It seems strange to me, but, of course, I'm imagining things.
>
> I'm sitting in a restaurant now, writing this letter, and just now I looked up and saw the strangest man eyeing me. A fellow with long black side-burns and black, hypnotic eyes . . . but all that goes to show how terribly much I'm worried about you, Burke, dear, and how much I miss you and love you. . . .

Burke Donlevy had read Jamie's letter over a half dozen times; and now as he clawed at the wet mud of a gouged battlefield, the letter and Jamie were the only things he wanted to think of. But he forced himself to remember the Huns.

He wanted to get up and he wanted to pick up his bayonetted rifle and chase the Huns like everybody else was doing. He wanted to run square into the machine-gun chatter emanating from a thousand feet away.

But for some reason, his brain was dulling, and his brain wouldn't give the command that would bring him to his feet. . . .

"There's another one over there. . . . It's Donlevy. Oh, God!"

"What did they do to him?" came another voice in answer to the first.

"Look at that, would you? This damned war. His legs. . . ."

"Easy does it, now. Take his arms. . . ."

Captain Burke Donlevy fainted and was out of the war.

CHAPTER II

"*YOU'LL never walk again!*"

Captain Burke Donlevy lay in his stateroom and heard the wash of the disturbed Atlantic against the gunwales of the convoyed liner on its way to America; and gritted his teeth as he heard again the fatal sentence.

"I'm giving it to you straight from the shoulder, old man. You'll jolly well have to take it. You'll never walk again."

That was the voice of Britain's greatest nerve-specialist; and Burke had lain stiff in the bed, his unseeing eyes looking out over the green English countryside.

"Beastly business. Can't be helped. Your legs look good—damned fine unscarred muscular specimens. But they won't *walk!* Matter of the nerves. Tried patching them up with some silver tubing, but they got you here an hour too late, even for me. Paralyzed for good, by God." *Harrumph.* "Well, Donlevy—" There was a moment of uncomfortable, bluff pause. Then the nerve-specialist had left.

Burke closed his eyes against the pain that scalded through his thoughts. It seemed ironical that they had given him a Distinguished Service Cross. . . .

"I HAVEN'T had much opportunity to speak to you alone, Dinakki," he said, addressing the new factotum whom Jamie had mentioned in her last letter three weeks ago. "These past couple days since I got back my time has been filled up with well-meaning friends who think they have to drop by to offer me their sympathy. Now I want to hear the whole story. You say Miss Sutherland is no longer here?"

He sat straight-backed in his wheelchair, in the sunlit living room of his California home, a young-old man whose gray eyes and firm lips were etched with bitterness.

Dinakki was spare-boned, high of cheek, long of nose, dark of skin; when he spoke his eyes lidded, and his sensuous mobile lips curled away from white horse-teeth.

"Yes, sir," he answered.

"You mean she left when she received my letter from the English hospital?"

"No, sir."

Dinakki's bony hand reached into an inner pocket. He handed Burke a sealed letter.

"She was gone before she received the letter, sir."

Burke's hands shook. He had written Jamie a letter, telling her their marriage was impossible.

If she hadn't read the letter, why had she left?

Dinakki spoke again, his words peculiarly slurred.

"If I may be permitted, sir. Miss Sutherland has been gone three weeks. She simply disappeared, saying nothing to me."

Burke saw Dinakki's hands clenching and unclenching, as if he might be undergoing an emotional strain. But of course it couldn't be that. He was a little nervous, in the presence of his new master.

Dinakki continued. "I entered her

room. She had not packed. I notified the police, sir, and although they rather laughed at my suspicions, I understand they still have a man on the case."

The blood drained away from Burke's face. "My God! You mean you think she was kidnaped? Why wasn't I informed of this?"

"Fearing that your recovery might be impeded, I did not inform you."

Dinakki's eyes flickered. "Besides, sir, the element of the—ah—fantastic enters the case, and I have a feeling—Your pardon, sir."

Dinakki excused himself. He turned, smoothly ascended the stairs to Burke's study, where Burke had written most of his scientific textbooks, before the war, when he had been an advanced science instructor at Cal. U.

Burke stiffened. What did Dinakki have in mind?

Dinakki came down holding a waxy, greenish metal box. He extended it to Burke. Burke took it numbly.

"I've been keeping it in your desk, sir, which explains why you haven't seen it since you've been here. I thought it best that you rid yourself of your social obligations before tending to what I feel—for some reason—may be insignificant."

Burke turned the box over. But was it a box? That had been his first impression. There was no crack indicating a lid or any other kind of opening in that hard, glass-smooth surface. It might have been merely a block of metal three inches deep, a foot long, eight inches wide.

Burke found himself looking at one end of the peculiar object.

Deeply engraved onto the metal was his name!

BURKE looked sharply upward at Dinakki.

"But—but where did this come from?"

"It appeared on your desk three days ago, sir."

"*Appeared* there?"

"Your room has been locked except when I have reason to enter it, sir. No one else could possibly have entered."

Burke returned his fascinated gaze to the engraved name. An eerie feeling of strangeness, of unreality, was coming over him. He felt as if there were ghosts in the room; he felt a presentiment of coming events which were so far beyond the pale of what *could* happen that they were fantasy. He brushed the thoughts aside.

He was aware that Dinakki was watching the object with a restrained eagerness.

Then, suddenly, there was a clicking sound.

The box flew open in Burke's hand!

He stared at it for a numb moment. It was a box, all right—like the interior of a music box, with a compartment that was open on top; and another compartment that was closed over.

In the open compartment was a greyish envelope with Burke's name written on it—in Jamie Sutherland's handwriting.

Burke's fingers were trembling as he picked up the stiff parchment envelope, extracted the brief scrawl of handwriting. A letter from Jamie! An incredible letter which knocked at the doors of sanity, which threatened to tumble him into an abyss of idiocy.

> Dearest Burke, if only this reaches you! But Niggle says it will. She brought me the box, with the time-mechanism in it. She says she has prepared it so that it will open only when your hands touch at it, when the electrical vibrations of the cells of your brain cancel out the vibrations which

keep the box sealed. No other force in the universe could open it.

Burke, believe everything I say. I have so little time to say it in. I was kidnapped by time-machine and I'm in Lolarth, and I can't even tell you the year, because there's a difference of millions of years.

Do you understand, Burke, dear? Time-machine! You must build a time-machine, Burke! And you must come back and get me before the prime minister Jern Teermas forces me to become his queen. It is possible. You know so much of science. You must take this box apart, study the mechanism, make a bigger machine and you must come and save me.

Someone is coming. Niggle says set the pointer of the dial at (Here there was a row of simple but alien marks which must have corresponded to numerical digits).

The letter ended there, the last character of those strange numbers hard to make out. The letter wasn't even signed. Jamie must have been in a hurry, frightened by approaching footsteps.

He folded the letter slowly, with clumsy, fumbling fingers, his mind leaping, churning with a multitude of outrageous, unbelievable thoughts. Time machine . . . millions of years . . . it was impossible!

CHAPTER III

HOW long he sat there, struggling against the chill insanity that letter could bring if he let it do so, he did not know. But then he was suddenly aware of Dinakki, standing over him, waiting to pounce, like a thin, bony vulture. The simile frightened him. A thought obtruded itself into his mind—without reason.

Who is Dinakki? Where did he ever get that name? Where does he belong in this tangle? Where did he get that accent?

And as quick as it had formed, the suspicion was discarded, thrust away as a senseless bit of nonsense. Dinakki was concerned—he was worried. He was simply a good servant, of course.

Only gradually did his thoughts begin to function normally—if dealing with a subject like this could be called normal.

Suddenly he was on fire. A terrific urgency grew in him, an urge to do, to do something, anything, to find Jamie. No matter what the cost to him personally, he had to save her from whatever horrid fate she faced.

Where there had been only bitterness and a hatred of life, there was hope and determination and a flaming desire to live—for Jamie.

The rebirth of emotion livened his dulled brain, brought into sharp focus the thing he must accomplish. He snapped his fingers with a delighted glee as the idea came to him. You'll never walk again, eh, Burke Donlevy? Well, by Heaven, he'd walk again or know the reason why!

He took a furious turn up and down the room, then swung the wheelchair around on a pinpoint to face Dinakki. He talked rapidly.

And Dinakki, the man who had applied to Jamie for a job on the very day that Burke's former factotum had been killed in a gruesome automobile accident; Dinakki, beneath whose eyes glittered a strange, ominous knowledge—Dinakki listened.

He seemed not one whit surprised that there was such a thing as time-travel. Was not surprised that Burke was going to build a time-machine—a time-machine *with legs!* He merely listened, suggested ways and means, and agreed to do all he could to help.

THE urgency in Burke grew. He was like a madman, drawing up plans, tinkering with the mechanism in the time-box for hours on end, wondering what genius of a future millions of years away had invented the fantastic machinery that could travel the trail of years.

As he completed the plans for various sections of the bipedomobile, as he had decided to call it, he gave the plans to Dinakki. Dinakki in turn took them to a foundry. But the plans for the time-machinery itself, which would be installed in the bipedomobile, he kept himself; he sent for the parts and put the machinery together himself.

Burke vaguely disliked Dinakki, even slightly distrusted him, but the man was handy to have around, and so Burke kept him on.

Burke walked doggedly in the weeks that passed, a suffocating dread in his mind. Jamie's sweet smile, the full, tender curve of her cheek were always in his mind's eye, a torturing vision.

The parts for the fantastic bipedomobile grew. The legs, the rounded body, the instrument board, the motor, the gasoline tanks, the plexiglass cupola which would fit onto the body, hermetically sealing him in from any dangers he might meet when he landed in the far distant time where Jamie was a prisoner.

He hired two men one day, gave them running commands as they put the machine together.

They plainly thought Burke was crazy, making a legged machine which wouldn't work anyway, but Burke was paying them well, and they finished the job in jig time.

After they had gone, Burke drew from a closet a 50-caliber machine-gun. He looked on the weapon with a glittering eye. He had written a letter to a friend of his dead father's, one of the big war plant owners, had bluntly asked him for this weapon.

Burke had not expected the favor to be granted. But it was. Although Burke did not know it, he was one of the more famous war heroes. He never listened to the radio or read newspapers, because they brought home to him the bitterness of his own condition. That misfortune had totally cut him off from the world he knew, and he did not want to be reminded of that world. But, because a nation did revere him, the war plant owner sent Burke the weapon without so much as a question concerning why he wanted it.

Why did he want it? Burke grinned, savagely. There had been a note of ominousness in Jamie's letter. Burke was prepared to meet danger more than halfway.

He wheeled the wheel chair toward the open door of the bipedomobile. He laboriously dragged himself in, drew the machine gun in with him. In the next half-hour, the machine gun was bolted solidly to its emplacements, and Burke was looking through the sighter and swinging the long wicked barrel on imaginary enemies.

Done! The machine was done, finished, ready for its journey into the future. Burke felt a dizzy thrill of elation as he threw in the gasoline motor, heard it chugging away beneath his feet. The gyroscope, which would keep the two-legged machine balanced, just like the delicate bones in the human inner ear, hummed smoothly upward to its maximum speed.

Burke depressed the lever which drew the balancing rod away from the floor and into the bipedomobile. The bipedomobile was now standing on its own two feet.

And a second later, Burke threw the motor into low.

The machine started to walk, great, tip-toeing steps, oiled knees bending, rounded body remaining perfectly erect—like an incredible metal robot. It walked smoothly, unjarringly back and forth between the walls of the laboratory. And the man inside, handling the wonderfully smooth controls, bit at his lip and tried to keep the tears of joy from streaming down his face.

Captain Burke Donlevy, retired, could walk again.

BURKE awoke in the middle of the night, pulses hammering. He had heard a sound. A sound that came from his workshop!

A clammy fear took hold of him. He thrust the bed covers aside, grabbed his crutches. He made it to the workshop in one minute; just as a wild scream sounded.

The workshop lights were on. A man was in the room. That man was Dinakki. He was plastered back against the wall, holding onto his arm, while a terrible, insane pain contorted his face. He saw Burke.

"You devil!" he screamed. "You've known all along. You've played with me. And I thought you were a fool!"

"I haven't known anything all along," Burke said in a steel voice. "But I'm going to know it pretty darn soon." He opened a drawer in the lab. table, drew out a Luger, held it on Dinakki's breast. "I have mistrusted you, for some reason. Maybe that's why I wired the door of the bipedomobile with a high voltage. To keep meddlers out. Now suppose you talk. Why—"

Dinakki did not listen.

"You devil!" Dinakki screamed again. "By my sacred Kimber, you don't know how you've tortured me. For weeks and weeks, until your very name has driven me mad!"

He babbled senselessly. Suddenly he threw himself forward, his intention obvious, to sweep Burke off his feet, to seize the gun, to turn the tables.

Burke fired.

Dinakki stopped in his tracks, blood gushing from his shoulder. He gave a whimper of pain, turned, blundered away, disappeared through the door.

Burke stood silently, pallid of face. On the ground floor, he heard a door slam shut.

What had Dinnaki meant by saying that Burke had tortured him?

Burke didn't know. But he did know that Dinakki was free—and a menace. At any time, he might return, might strike, unexpectedly, in his attempt to gain control of the machine. And Burke had had to let him go. He couldn't have shot the man in the back to stop him, no matter what horrible plan the man was part of.

What then? Events were shaping to a head. Some unbelievable tapestry of events, cosmic in scope, had swept him up, and he had no choice but to make himself part of the warp and woof. His mind was made up within seconds after Dinakki's departure.

Twenty minutes later, he was ready. He felt a great excitement. His love of life, lost on a battleground, had returned! He was useful again, important again, and only he could do the job. He was a warrior again, Captain Burke Donlevy, with a 50-caliber machine gun at hand, with a powerful urge to do or die. He was hot with eagerness to see Jamie again, hear her thrilling voice, feel the touch of her slender white fingers on his cheek. She needed him.

She could be the captive of a thousand dragons, and he would rescue her!

She could be lost in the deepest pit in the earth, and he would find her!

Nothing could stop him now.

His trembling hand reached forward, touched at the pointer of the temporal-lapse dial.

"Niggle says set the pointer of the dial at. . . ."

The last line of Jamie's letter rang in his mind. He had made the time machinery of his bipedomobile an exact duplicate of the time machinery in the box, even down to the characters on the peculiarly numbered dial. Only in that way could he be certain to land exactly where Jamie wanted him to.

He set the dial.

He made adjustments on the instrument board.

And then he flipped the tab.

All hell broke loose. A ravening, indigo violence of flame burned through his eyes, into his soul, and something wrenched at his whole body with excruciating agony—turning him inside out. But even through the awful pain that he knew, he experienced a great burst of joy.

Into the future!

CHAPTER IV

HE groaned. Consciousness came back. He opened his eyes, grey eyes that were reddened where little blood vessels had burst. He felt as if he had gone through a cream separator. But he was whole, and he could think, and he remembered what had just occurred. He had made the trip.

The plexiglass half sphere which arched over him was covered with steam. Water was running down its walls. Burke himself was covered with perspiration, and he thanked the intuition that had made him dress coolly.

What was outside?

An equatorial, tropical rain forest, and off in the distance the mysterious city of the future, Lolarth, where Jamie, for some mountainously baffling reason, was held prisoner?

Or was he in the city itself?

Those numbers that Niggle (who was she?) had given Jamie comprised, of course, the exact *when* and *where* of Lolarth. Not only should he be in the correct time, but he should also be in the correct place.

But not too near danger! Therefore, he wouldn't be in Lolarth.

One way to find out, where he was. He was humming with a tense cheerfulness as he ran a chamois over the interior of the plexiglass. Slowly a new world, a fantastic, rampant, rampaging world unfolded to his widening eyes.

His breath caught in his throat. He grabbed at the edge of the instrument board, incredulity contorting his lips.

He was on the edge of a swamp, a swamp that steamed and smoked with white, primeval vapors; a swamp from which spreading conifers and ferns and crinoids thrust themselves upward into a sky which was one solid mass of heavy, rolling clouds.

He saw a creature with bat-like wings soaring in out of the torrid, oppressive gloom of a lost eternity.

And on the edge of the swamp, browsing negligently on the topmost parts of the astounding vegetation, he saw long-necked, long-tailed, armored, horny-backed beasts.

They were dinosaurs.

Dinosaurs. . . .

A low, protesting cry erupted from Burke's corded throat.

He had not come to the future.

He had come to the past—millions of years ago; the time of the reptile rulers of the world!

FOR a long moment, he refused to believe what his senses told him was truth. And then the reason for it all came to him in a rush. He started to laugh. What a fool he had been. Jamie had said nothing about the future in her letter. True, she hadn't mentioned the past, either, but she had been in such a hurry that she wasn't able clearly to state her exact adventures.

She had said millions of years distant, and had thought Burke would assume she meant distant in the past. He had, on the contrary, supposed she had referred to the future. It was a natural mistake, of course, because everybody knew that man did not yet exist that far in the past.

And then he had a new thought. What if something had gone wrong with the time machinery, and he had been hurled in the wrong direction? Worse yet, what if Niggle had given Jamie the wrong numbers? Or what if Jamie had made a mistake and copied wrong?

He groaned with the thought. Then she would be lost to him forever, for it would be impossible to travel up and down the millions of years, looking for a city by the name of Lolarth.

He quieted his thrumming nerves. He wouldn't give up yet. It was against all odds that there could be a city, a human city, here in this time, for man simply was not contemporary with the dinosaurs; so the geologists stated.

Still, there was the mere chance that the geologists had been wrong, that for some unguessed reason, they simply hadn't found fossilized human bones belonging to this period.

On that slim hope he must base his whole course of action.

Feverishly hoping, Burke put the bipedomobile into low, then into second, high, and fourth. He thrilled to the incredible, swift running pace. Sixty, seventy, eighty miles an hour the metal monstrosity ran across the soft humus of that lost time, broad metal feet effortlessly hurling the whole machine for thirty foot steps. Donlevy laughed joyously. No speed laws, no thirty-five mile limit—he had legs again!

And where was Lolarth?

He did not find it, not that day, nor the next. A desperate fear grew. He might be in the correct time, but thousands of miles away.

"A hundred gallons of gas," he thought despairingly. The bipedomobile was conserving of fuel, but he'd exhaust his supply if he had to go too far. And petroleum deposits did not yet exist!

That night, he disconsolately drank from a thermos, ate dehydrated foods, slept on the floor of the machine. In the morning he started off early—and after a half hour, had his first proof that human beings existed in this time!

THE hairy creature was directly in the path of the machine. His short arms were weakly trying to dislodge a heavy, fallen fern from across his chest.

Evidently some herbiverous dinosaur had knocked the fern over, and this fellow had been in the way.

Burke had made a silent rule not to leave the bipedomobile unless he had to. He now crawled to the helpless creature. His bearded face, his blue, intelligent eyes, immediately showed his fear.

"Steady!" Burke snapped. "I'm a friend. Hold still—we'll try to lever this off."

The man subsided, weakly. And Burke did not see his eyes glazing, turning dull, as he feverishly strained at the heavy, leafy trunk. When he finally did free the body, the man was —dead!

"Dead!" Burke burst the word out with a protesting cry. His shoulders sagged. This tragedy seemed like a portent of ominous events to come.

There was nothing to do with the body, he thought bitterly, than to leave it here. He started to turn toward the machine when he saw the pendant.

Burke frowned. Well, why not? If he didn't take it, it would be lost anyway. He drew the stained black cord over the dead man's neck, brought the iridescent, heavy circular pendant free. He looked at it curiously, turned it over, fondled it—and suddenly it snapped open!

But there was nothing inside that Burke could see. Etched into the brassy back of the pendant was a series of concentric circles. They were delicate, precise in form, seemed to glow with a lingering radiance. Burke studied this for a moment, then shrugged uncaringly, dropped the pendant over his neck, and promptly forgot it, as he dug a grave for the body in the soft decayed humus.

A fit of depression seized him as the bipedomobile hurled man-like through the jungle. He was no nearer his goal, he was lost, he was a fool to think he could rescue Jamie, and he might as well go home.

And then, for the second time that day, he ran across a human being.

A piercing, spine-tingling scream lanced the air.

Burke's face drained. He snapped his head around toward the source of the scream—and froze with horror.

To his right was a slimy, steamy lake. Cutting across the lake, white wet arms flashing, was a girl. The lake was more like a watery swamp, and the girl half ran, half swam.

Her golden hair shone in the pale sunlight. Her feet moved madly against the viscous swamp water. She didn't take time to look over her shoulder at the towering beast whose head was now swooping down toward her, to pluck her from the water with long yellow fangs.

In another moment, those teeth would close on that frail white body, and then Burke knew that he would know true horror.

For beyond the fact that she was a girl and helpless, there was another reason why she must be saved.

The girl was Jamie Sutherland!

CHAPTER V

JAMIE SUTHERLAND! A dry, voiceless insanity touched at Burke's brain. It couldn't be Jamie. It was an illusion. She was in Lolarth. She—

He burst into a full-throated, tormented groan. If his mind was slow, however, his hands were not.

The bipedomobile stopped its hurtling flight on the instant. And in the next instant, Burke's hands had swung the machine gun around, had lined the sights on the creature's head. It was a dinosaur, Burke knew—and it must be a carniverous dinosaur. And yet all dinosaurs were supposed to be herbiverous! The scientists had slipped up on more than one item in regard to the carboniferous era, Burke now knew.

His burst of fire from the machine gun was mute testimony to his shaking nerves. He missed his target, which had been the beast's head. But a thick column of pulsing arterial blood erupted from the mammoth creature's neck.

Burke almost shouted with joy. For the dinosaur now raised its head, entirely forgot the girl, whom Burke knew to be Jamie, and with a roar that shook the ground so that the bipedomobile actually quivered, turned at right angles and charged directly for Burke.

For a while Burke held his ground, a solid stream of fire and lead spouting from the machine gun, straight into the bestial, terrifying head. Burke shot one bulging eye away—and the creature was almost on him.

His heart almost stopped beating, and his stomach caved in. He knew a wild burst of grief. That he should die, when he almost had accomplished his purpose. Then his hands acted again, and the bipedomobile wheeled on one foot, and hurled away.

Burke wildly looked over his shoulder as he guided the plunging machine through the jungle. The dinosaur was coming after him like fury, believing it was on the track of a living creature, and knowing nothing of a metal robot. Blood dripped in great rivers from its head, but its one eye was still in good working order.

The bipedomobile burst from the jungle; ahead was a lush, grassy plain. Burke held his breath, and wondered if he dared take a chance.

He did. He set his controls. He savagely twisted the cupola in which he sat, twisted it around until the machine gun was pointing at the roaring creature. The bipedomobile hurled in the other direction.

The machine gun chattered vengefully.

At any moment, the bipedomobile might step into a bog and break off a leg, or helplessly founder. It was traveling blind, at full speed opposite to the direction Burke was looking.

Burke was perspiring, his teeth bared savagely. And then an elated whoop left his lips; the dinosaur was done for!

The pursuing beast buckled up on its own legs. The momentum of its motion skidded it forward for fifty feet before it stopped, slumped to the ground, its one good eye sightlessly open. Its tail thundered at the ground convulsively, stopped.

"Phew!" Burke flung sweat from his forehead. He thought, "The beast must have been dead two or three minutes ago—but his brain is so small and his body so big his nervous system didn't have time to let the body know it!"

AT full speed, he drove the bipedomobile back to the swampy lake where he had seen the girl.

She was lying on her back, crumpled up, on the shore of the lake.

In another moment, Burke had her lovely, sweetly clothed body cradled in tender arms, and tears were unashamedly glinting in his eyes. Thank God! Another moment and he would have been too late. By an incredible coincidence, he had found her—in time!

Her eyes were closed. Her skin was deathly pale. He wiped green muck from her face and her arms. She was the same Jamie, flawless of feature, with perfect white teeth, with arching dark brows over her hazel eyes. Her hair was made up differently, but that was to accommodate the jeweled metal ribbon drawn around her forehead. Her clothing too was different, a suit of some heavy material, drawn tightly at waist and breast with tassels of silver chain. She wore sandals, on the straps of which were blue-green jewels. And she seemed thinner, worn with fatigue.

What had happened to her? Why had they kidnapped her and then let her go? Or had she escaped? The full strangeness of what was occurring hit him in all its force. He looked around at his alien surroundings with a shiver. Steaming, lost land! What secrets were hidden in Earth's past?

He tenderly stroked Jamie's cheek. Her breast heaved. She moaned. Red stained her cheeks. Burke felt life go pulsing through her body. He stooped and kissed her lips—brushed them in a caress. When she regained consciousness and found herself in Burke's—her own Burke's arms, her joy would be too great for mere emotion to express.

As his lips touched hers, her eyes opened—hazel eyes, Jamie's eyes. He drew his head up and grinned down at her, waiting for the light of recognition.

But she didn't smile. Her curved, red lips pursed. Her hand came up and struck Burke across the cheek.

The next thing he knew, she had struggled from his arms, was on her feet, her fists clenched, her eyes blazing with what could be nothing less than uncontrolled ire. She broke into a rapid shrill flow of vituperation, screaming, shouting, yelling.

Burke stared at her as if he were mad, as if the world had just come to an end.

"But—but Jamie!" he stammered. "It's I—It's Burke!"

He stopped in horror. She wasn't even speaking English. She was speaking—or, rather, cursing—with the same peculiar liquid flow of words which the hairy stranger had used.

"Jamie!" he exclaimed, appalled. "Oh, God! What have they done to you? It's Burke, honey—Burke! Don't you remember? We love each other, dear—" His face paled. She understood nothing he said.

The anger was still on her face. She let go a final broadside at him. Then she drew to one side, and irritably began to clear her skin of the swamp slime with bits of grass. Now and then she cast Burke an indignant look.

A COLD pounding began at the base of his skull. He remembered Jamie's letter. She had written about a dark, swarthy man with hypnotic eyes. Hypnotic! They had hypnotized Jamie, somehow. Any civilization that could produce a time machine could do that to perfection. They had taken away Jamie's memory. She didn't know her native language. She didn't know Burke. It was inconceivable, but it was obviously true. A great grief took hold of him. He shook it off determinedly. He couldn't take Jamie back to the twentieth century now—not in this condition. He would have to find who had hypnotized her—he would find that person, and force him to make Jamie her old self!

He watched her numbly. She was repairing her hair.

Finally he picked up his crutches, and quickly went back to the bipedomobile. He got in and sat on the leather chair glumly.

"Mero-ka nid nid?" a puzzled, soft voice said.

She was standing on the ground near the door, looking up at him with the same smile that had charmed him when he had first met her. The same? Her smile, he now saw with a sinking heart, was a trifle tauter, more wilful, almost barbaric. And there were tiny little wrinkles about her eyes, her lips, that he had never seen on Jamie. His face paled.

Perhaps it had been years ago that Jamie had sent him the time-letter! Perhaps the time-machinery had landed the bipedomobile not only far away from Lolarth, but years away from the Lolarth where Jamie had wanted him to land!

And then he knew that he was being foolish. She had gone through some especial kind of hell, God knows what kind. It would age anybody.

She pointed instinctively at his crutches, asked her question again.

Burke's smile was bitter. "Never mind, Jamie. It happened millions of years ago—acome, I mean. I wrote you a letter about it, but you never did get it."

She looked at him intently, blinking a little. Did Burke see a puzzled light of recognition deep in her hazel eyes? It might be just his imagination. He couldn't be sure.

She put her hands on her hips, her face thoughtful. Then she grabbed hold of the grab-rail on the side of the doorway, stepped into the bipedomobile. She wasn't a tall girl, but she had to stoop.

Her eyes were grave. Suddenly she pointed into the distance.

"Godwa te lele!"

"It's all Sanskrit to me, Jamie," he said sadly. "They've sure done you up brown, haven't they—you've forgotten entirely, haven't you? Well, if you want to go in that direction, okay. It's as good as any, and maybe we'll solve a few mysteries while we're at it. We might even find out how to get your memory back again."

She smiled dazzlingly. She pointed again.

The bipedomobile moved off, finally was flinging itself headlong across the length of an alluvial plain. Far ahead, an outre, blood-red sun was pouring crimson light through the cloud-bank that overlay this ancient, carboniferous world. The sun sank. The hours passed. The moon flooded the world.

From out of the macabre night came the coughs and groans and squeaks and whirrings of numberless insects and reptiles.

There were not yet any birds.

Burke sat at the controls with a sad, relaxed expression on his face. The greatest triumphs of life always had their let-downs. He had found Jamie, and she was only a husk, not the Jamie he had known, a Jamie he could hold in his arms and tell he loved, but a pitiful, hypnotized girl who did not even know him.

CHAPTER VI

ALL that night they traveled through a fantastic world that died more than a hundred million years ago.

Burke now and again watched Jamie from the corner of his eyes. She sat on the floor, chin pensively resting on her bare knees. What went on in her mind? Did she have a *new* memory? He felt a chilling despair.

There were other questions. Who was Dinakki? How and why was he in the twentieth century? How had Jamie escaped the prime minister of Lolarth, Jern Teer-mas, and what had happened to Niggle, whoever she was?

He felt a soul-wrenching weariness at the unanswerableness of those questions.

The girl slept during the night, after satisfying herself that Burke was going in the right direction.

When the sun came thundering out of the horizon-mists of that dawn-world, she awoke, and looked about her, her face transfigured with a great joy. She burst into an excited speech, gesturing at Burke, and greatly disappointed that he did not understand her.

Her pleasure grew as, in the next hour, the bipedomobile was climbing with great, sweeping strides the side of a mountain. They reached a plateau, turned around a shoulder of the mountain—and Burke saw a city!

A city? It was more like an encampment. Homes were built of rocks and slabs of granite. It was a city of savages, naked children and coarsely dressed women moving through the streets.

Jamie put a hand on Burke's arm.

The touch was as tingling as if she had meant it for a caress. He stopped the bipedomobile.

Jamie jumped from the open door just as a number of men came running from the village. They were gaunt, bony men with great beards, except for one, only a youth. He caught Jamie in his arms, hugged her, and kissed her. She returned his kisses, and her laughter and speech rang out.

Burke bitterly watched. It must have been a reunion. Soon the entire village population came running, shouting and screaming. Children clustered around Jamie. As if they knew her!

Who was the youth who had kissed her? A terrible, helpless jealousy raged in his heart. Even her love for him had been changed.

Burke had not been forgotten, though. Jamie suddenly pointed imperiously backward toward the bipedomobile. Several husky youths, clad in tough snake-skin garments, ran toward him. Two of them reached inside, grabbed him. He tried to resist, in a flurry of anger. But he was ignominiously picked up, hoisted to two capable shoulders, and borne off past Jamie and toward the middle of the village.

Burke struggled and yelled, his face scarlet. "Put me down!" he yelled. "Damn you, I can get around myself. I don't need any help!"

They didn't pay any attention to him. He was taken into one of the stone huts, gently placed in a chair. A mist of anger clouded Burke's vision. Ragingly, he threw himself from the stone chair. But his "bearers" had already gone.

Wearily, Burke drew himself to a sitting position. The interior of this hut was clean, cushions of a soft material strewn about the floor, which in turn was covered with a rumpled silk-like cloth of heavy texture. The chairs were three, four, and five legged. There was a four-legged table.

Was this city Lolarth? Burke wondered. No! It couldn't be. But Jamie had acted as if she knew everybody. But she couldn't have known them! Nor could they know her—unless they too had been given a memory which included her. But that was idiotic, unless Jamie had been here for years. But he felt almost certain that couldn't be so.

He stretched out on the floor. A dark cloud of fatigue enveloped his brain. He sank immediately into a deep abyss of sleep.

WHEN he awoke, he knew instinctively that something had happened.

He was no longer in the stone hut.

He felt straps on his hands and around his hips. Above him was a brilliant white light. Not an electric light. But something else, the product of a science that existed millions of years before Burke was born. Perhaps a radioactive element.

He turned his head.

He was in another stone hut now, but the walls gleamed with strange instruments of surgery.

Around him Burke saw some of the long-bearded, coarsely dressed men who had greeted Jamie. There was only one paying more than ordinary attention to Burke. This man held what could have been nothing but—a hypodermic needle.

Burke watched in fascination. Strangely, in the moment while the needle hovered just above the naked skin of his strapped forearm, he felt no fear. He felt only a squirming shame of his nakedness, of his useless limbs.

He knew, of course, what the needle was for. Oh, he knew, all right. They were doing the same thing to him that they had done to Jamie. His body would live, but it would live as a different person—as an entity with a new memory.

The certainty of that fate he met with equanimity. He was resigned. Let them do with him as they would. This was a devil's land. Jamie, the Jamie he knew, was gone. And Captain Burke Donlevy, retired, was ready to die.

He turned his head away, in numb, forlorn bitterness. He felt the needle plunge home—and after that, he felt much the same as when the time machinery had impelled him across the eons to a time incredibly remote from the "present."

A vertigo—a blinding brilliance—an intolerable sense of inside-outness—and all memory of being was sucked away. . . .

HE AWOKE and sat up, and an apple-cheeked old man was smiling at him. The apple-cheeked man was sitting cross-legged. His feet were bare, but this was because he had discarded his sandals to one side. He held a stiff-leafed book in his lap.

He began to talk in soft accents.

"Crela," he uttered pleasantly, pointing to the book. He pointed to himself. "Verassa."

"Pleased to meet you, Verassa," Burke said blankly, and pointing to himself: "Captain Burke Donlevy—retired."

Verassa made a hasty mumbling attempt to pronounce the full name, but all he got out of it was Retard. Burke grinned nastily.

"Retard it is, old boy," he snarled. He was in a bad humor. He didn't want an old man keeping him company. He looked restlessly toward the door. "I want Jamie," he snapped. "I'm perfectly willing to learn the language. But I want Jamie—or whatever you call her—I want her to teach me the language."

Verassa made a few more attempts to point out objects by their name. When Burke didn't cooperate, he put his sandals on with dignity, drew his robe about him, and stalked from the hut.

Burke was instantly regretful. Disconsolately, he reflected on the incident of the hypodermic. They hadn't changed him at all, hadn't stolen his memory. So they'd had some other purpose. What? He shook his head. A helpless confusion was growing in him. There were too many mysteries, and he didn't know the language so that he could find their answers.

A child brought in a crude wooden tray, filled with various succulents wrapped in fern leaves. The child watched Burke with bright shoe-button eyes, and held the tray while Burke lifted the various food items and cautiously nibbled at them. He ended up by eating everything on the tray.

"Look," he said to the child. "Bring me Jamie. Jamie!"

The child giggled and ran. Burke swore.

Then his eyes lighted. They had brought his crutches. In another moment, he was swiftly working his way down the avenue between the rows of homes.

He looked desperately around for Jamie. But in that whole afternoon, he saw nothing of her. Indeed, the whole village was unpopulated save for very old men and women and many small children.

Where had Jamie gone, and what in the world was her purpose?

He saw the bipedomobile. Somebody had been thoughtful, for a guard, armed with a pecularily lensed weapon, was standing guard in front of the two-legged machine. The guard grinned and stepped aside. But Burke didn't feel like going for a ride. It was a relief, though, to know that his property was considered inviolate.

TWO days later, during which time Verassa had made a slight headway into the language for Burke, Burke heard the village filling up—and filling up with a vengeance. He went to the doorway of his hut. Fierce, high-cheeked men with red beards strode down the street by the scores. There were other dark men, quiet, subdued, carrying spears and what seemed like sling-shots. Only a very few of these men were armed with the double-lensed weapon that the guard watching the bipedomobile had carried.

One word streamed in Burke's mind as he saw the motley, grim concourse. *War!*

Burke saw Jamie. He started toward her, with an involuntary cry of greeting. She looked at him casually, smiled faintly, as if she had more important things on her mind than him, and disappeared into a large stone building—the community hall.

Burke boiled. He bit at his lip, smashed his fist into his palm, cursed during that afternoon. By God, it was senseless! He was held captive in this time—held captive by his love for a girl who *had* loved him, millions of years *acome,* but now treated him as less than the dust beneath her feet!

Burke saw that the community hall was filling up. He heard voices raised in speech-making. And suddenly he heard a voice that touched an astounding chord of recognition in his brain.

He was a statue, poised with the horror of that recognition. It couldn't be. But suddenly he grabbed his crutches, and went at break-neck speed. He stood in the door of the community hall. The fierce warriors who had been filling up the city were sitting cross-legged, listening to a speaker—a man whose voice rose insolently, stridently; a man clad in a neatly cut cured reptile-skin, who gestured scornfully, irately, who walked up and down the crude earth floor; a man with long sideburns and flashing white horse-teeth.

And the speaker was—

Dinakki!

CHAPTER VII

BURKE reeled, pressing the tips of his fingers to his madly thudding temples. He closed his eyes, wondering if it were an illusion—a particularly obnoxious illusion. But when he opened his eyes again, Dinakki was still there.

Not only there, but looking at him! He continued to talk, his voice filled with a savage emotion, but most of his attention was on Burke. Dinakki's coal-black eyes were sardonic with a bleak humor. He was laughing at Burke, laughing silently, in such a way that nobody but Burke would know it.

He was taunting Burke. And he was probably hoping that Burke's sanity would be lost. Burke turned with a muffled cry, and for a long moment looked into space. His thoughts quieted, but only because he forced them to. Time-travel! Anything seemed possible with time-travel. It would explain Dinakki's presence here. But would it explain why he was haranguing these barbaric people, urging them into war?

BURKE was sitting cross-legged in his hut, surrounded with pillows. He was the very essence of comfort.

But as Dinakki, preceded by his long dark shadow, slowly, lugubriously entered the hut, it was obvious he was not impressed.

He stood in the doorway, eyes sardonic, filled with a subtle, poisonous hate.

"I live," he said. He gestured limply with his long bony arm toward his shoulder, where Burke's bullet had struck him "days" ago. "It has been six months."

"Six months," Burke echoed faintly.

"Time makes no difference," said Dinakki smoothly. "It was a month before I regained the use of my arm. I made my—ah—residence at your home. Fortunately, you had rebuffed most of your friends, and they were no bother. It took me five months to make the time-machine—working from the blueprints which I—ah—found in the locked drawer of your laboratory table."

"I see," said Burke grimly.

"I set the dials of my time-machine at the same numeral that Jamie indicated in her letter. You remember the letter? You carelessly left it in your desk. At any rate, it is probable that I landed in this age at the same time as you and very near the same place, though not so near as I would have wished. I found a nearby village where I was known and was there in time to offer my services against Lolarth.

"I did not build a bipedomobile, however, that admirable creation of yours, and which you seem to have taken such precautions to guard."

"Jamie did that for me."

Dinakki burst into a high-pitched, goading laugh. "Jamie! *Jamie!*"

Burke said coldly, "You don't have to laugh. I know she isn't really Jamie. I know they did something to her—something—" and his voice tightened "—that you know a lot about! Who are you, Dinakki? Why are you here? And why do you—hate me?"

"Hate you?" Dinakki uttered the word from a dry throat. "It isn't that I hate you—it is simply that I cannot breathe when I think of you—or when Jamie utters your name—Jamie—" His voice was wrenched, twisted with horrible emotion. His breath was racked, hoarse. Suddenly he was standing over Burke, murder written all over him.

Burke was tight in every nerve.

He kept his hand on his hidden Luger.

Dinakki said hoarsely, blindly, "No! No, not now. The time will come later—the day of reckoning will be all the more pleasurable if it is anticipated."

He was unbelievably agitated, mobile lips working. Suddenly, he turned, stumbled blindly toward the door.

Burke snapped out, "Wait a minute!"

Dinakki turned. His lip curled scornfully as he saw the Luger pointed at him.

Burke said, "Suppose you talk, and quick, before I blast you. Why is Jamie what she is?"

Dinakki said, "She is the Queen of Lolarth."

"Impossible! You're lying!"

BUT even as he uttered the words, he was trying to justify the statement. The prime minister of Lolarth had made himself king, had forced Jamie to marry him. And the ordeal had unhinged her mind.

More impossible.

"*My* mind is unhinging," he thought in dismay. "There isn't a logical answer in a carload. Jamie isn't crazy. She's just changed—changed!"

The gun trembled on Dinakki's bony chest.

"Now," he said, "suppose you tell me the whole story!"

Dinakki considered him through dark, lidded eyes.

"Don't be childish," he sneered.

"Talk, damn you!"

Dinakki's glance on the Luger was contemptuous.

Nonetheless, he talked; in a low monotone—but in such a manner that all pertinent facts concerning Jamie and Dinakki himself were left out. Dinakki had been double-crossed, to put it briefly. He had intended to kidnap Jamie himself, but someone else—who he would not say—had stolen Jamie before he had the chance. And Dinakki was marooned in the twentieth century, without any knowledge of how to make a time-machine, for such knowledge was in the hands only of the Kimber, the priesthood of Lolarth.

"After Jamie was taken," Dinakki said in low, bitter tones, "I saw the box on your desk. I knew instantly what it was. I tried to break it, I used acid on it, I tried pressure—all to no avail. I knew then that only the electrical vibrations from your brain-cells—vibrations as distinct as finger-prints—would react with the delicate inner mechanism of the box to open it.

"In the meantime, I received your letter for Jamie. I opened it. I learned you were coming home. I determined, after that, to wait until you had completed the machine, and then to take it from you. The rest you know. After you foiled me, I found the plans for the time-machinery, and made a time-machine of my own—a mere box which would carry me safely to my own time."

Burke charged, "Then you're a citizen of Lolarth! You wanted to take Jamie to Lolarth, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Why?"

Dinakki was silent.

Burke said in a deadly tone, "All right! We'll let that go for a while. Tell me about Lolarth."

A fanatical, glorious light flamed startlingly in Dinakki's eyes. "It is the most beautiful, the most exalted city—" he began, passionately, rising on his tip-toes as if he were straining every sense to convey his emotion. Then he slumped back, his chin dropping to his chest. "But soon it will be doomed," he whispered rackingly. "Doomed like all the others. But that may not be for decades, and so—"

"Doomed?" Burke watched Dinakki in consternation. "Pull yourself together," he snapped. "What do you mean? What could destroy it?"

"Dinosaurs."

"Dinosaurs! But dinosaurs for the most part are herbivorous. They wouldn't have any reason to attack and destroy a city."

There was an ominousness in Dinakki's voice. "It has happened a thousand times before," he said in a low, terrible voice. "All over the world you will find jungle where once proud cities stood. You will find the bones of men and women and children by the millions. Men and women and children who once lived and laughed and breathed and danced. But they are all gone now—all those people, and all those cities. Lolarth alone remains"

THE picture was frightening. Frigid chills touched momentarily at Burke's brain. In some measure, there was explained to Burke the terrible fate that had been dealt the human race in this unutterably remote past. This civilization had died—died completely, and man had gone back to the beast, requiring millions of years before he became civilized.

Lolarth, then, was doomed? Lolarth, last remaining center of this dawn-world civilization?

And against whom were these hill-men, these tribesmen, making war?

Dinakki's face went momentarily blank at the question. He said then, "Lolarth!"

Burke was shocked. "But you—you love Lolarth! And Jamie is Queen of Lolarth—so you say. Why should she make war on Lolarth?"

"Because she was overthrown by Jern Teer-mas."

"And the hillmen are her friends—they will wage war on Lolarth at her request?"

"All peoples love Lolarth, just as all peoples long for the return of the Kimber, the priesthood of Lolarth. Once these people had cities of their own, before the dinosaurs drove them out. Those cities and Lolarth were friendly—and Lolarth was the king-city. Cityless though these tribesmen be, they wish your—Jamie to be rightful ruler of Lolarth, and they will fight Lolarth to make her so."

Burke searched deeply beneath his glittering black eyes. Dinakki had betrayed him. A suspicion rang in his mind like a gong.

"You seek to betray Jamie!" he whispered.

A stormy emotion wrenched Dinakki's face. "Betray *Jamie?*" he cried. "Never! I—" Then he stopped, paling.

Burke lashed out, "You black-hearted devil, you'd betray anybody to gain your ends. I know enough about you—plenty that the Queen of Lolarth doesn't know, apparently—enough to prove that you're up to no good. Tell me, damn you, what it is you intend? To what ends are you using this army that Jamie is getting together?"

He waggled the gun fiercely.

The emotions died from Dinakki's face. He relaxed into contempt.

"You think to expose me. You think to tell of me, of my duplicity. Yet what have you to accuse me of? Who will you accuse me to? Your Jamie—" he gave the word a mocking intonation "—knows nothing of me save that I am loyal to the cause she espouses. And, Burke Donlevy, you are helpless—helpless in the midst of people who do not have any method of communication with you. Our language is a complex mass of words—it will be months before you can carry on a swift conversation. Weeks before you can do more than understand the simplest answer to your simplest question. How will you explain to the Queen of Lolarth anything of what you know of me when your tongue is thus tied?"

His bony hands went to his hips in a gesture of scorn.

"And that is the reason you will not shoot me. You would not like to be marooned, voiceless among these people, as you would be were I dead."

He stood over Burke. His nostrils flared. "Burke Donlevy," he whispered, "you shall be dead before I!"

Thereupon, a poisonous threat hanging on the air, he wheeled, went with long arrogant stride toward the door.

Burke snarled, "Come back, or I'll shoot!"

But Dinakki disappeared out the door, though Burke knew with all his heart that if he would bury a bullet in that broad bony back, he would save himself untold heartache and suffering in the future.

But he did not fire, and with a curse he flung the Luger from him.

CHAPTER VIII

TWO weeks passed. Burke did not use the bipedomobile. His supply of gas, he knew, was limited. And perhaps he could find no more such fuel in this lost age of Earth's history.

And he knew the time was coming when he would need his two legged machine. He sensed a stir in the air, an exciting stir. Momentous events were about to occur. The village was filling up with thousands upon thousands of hill-folk, fierce, broad-nostriled men who were armed with spears, bows and arrows, great cross-bows; with metal sticks which were sharp and pointed, but were certainly more than mere swords; with the double-lensed weapon; with a delicately molded machine mounted with infinite precision on the most delicate of springs, which in turn was based on a two wheeled trundle. Of this latter machine there was only one.

Mechanical weapons were treasures—weapons which depended on the action of exploding chemicals to eject a missile; which operated on storage cells to send a ravening beam of violence against an enemy.

Burke was beginning to understand the lost glory of this civilization. This village was a make-shift, thrown up in the last two years. The people who had built it were the remains of a glorious city which, Burke gathered from Verassa, his tutor, was called Luthor-el. Luthor-el had been destroyed by dinosaurs, and most of its inhabitants killed. Exactly how the dinosaurs accomplished that, Burke could not find out. It was as Dinakki had said: the language was too complex for him to learn more than generalities from his questions. Verassa could not make him understand.

Burke was filled with a sullen resentment toward Jamie, a resentment which he knew was uncalled for. Jamie was different, changed. It wasn't her fault that she no longer loved him, or knew him. But it was galling to be walking down the village street and have Jamie pass in deep conversation with a bearded patriarch, ignoring Burke entirely, or tendering him no more than a vague smile.

Once he saw her with the beardless youth who had embraced her when they first came to this village.

Burke was bitter with jealousy. Who was he? Were they, by some hellish twist of unreality, in love with each other? It must be, for now and again the youth would touch her hand eagerly, but she would draw away—with a tender smile.

One day the press of events came to a head. Jamie appeared with Verassa in the door of the hut. She drew herself up imperiously. She spoke swiftly, rapidly, arrogantly, barely looking at Burke, though it was to him she addressed her words. Then she made a gesture to Verassa, and turned away appearing to lose interest.

Verassa spoke hesitantly, choosing those words which Burke would surely understand.

"The queen of Lolarth, Brisil, extends greetings."

Brisil! This was the first time Burke had heard Jamie's other name.

"She says that now her armies march on her beloved Lolarth. She requires the stranger to lead her armies with her in his two legged machine."

BURKE gaped. He again sought out the meaning of the complex mass of wordage. It was truth. Jamie—Brisil—wanted Burke to lead the way through jungle and swamp to Lolarth.

Jamie still needed him! Even though she didn't know she was Jamie, the ties of their love were strong, strong. Brisil, in some thoroughly incomprehensible manner was Jamie, but she was also queen of Lolarth—also incomprehensibly. But she had been deposed. She had escaped into the swampland, and she had come to her friends here, asking them to march on Lolarth. During these past two weeks, the preparation for war had been in the making. Brisil wanted to regain her lost throne. And she needed Burke!

But where did Dinakki come in?

Burke was cold. He didn't know. He couldn't point a finger of suspicion.

Why should they believe him?—and what was there to accuse Dinakki of?

Yet there was a nagging pin-point of an intangible menace digging at his brain.

"Inform the queen of Lolarth," said Burke, clumsily, "that I will be delighted."

"She also desires to know if you will use your—chatter-weapon against the enemy."

"Whatever Jamie—whatever Brisil, queen of Lolarth, requires of me," Burke answered sadly, "I will do."

Verassa interpreted. Jamie turned her glorious calm eyes on Burke. She raised her hand in a sharp gesture, spoke rapidly, turned and left the hut.

"You will prepare for the departure at once," said Verassa. The old, apple-cheeked man hesitated, and then smiled upon Burke. "You have done very well with our tongue, and it was pleasant to have so apt a pupil. May we meet again, Burke Donlevy."

Burke stopped him before he could go. There was one mystery he wanted to clear up, something which had puzzled him greatly. He told Verassa about the hypodermic the old men had given him.

"Why?" Burke demanded tensely.

Verassa was helpless. He did not know. He was a scholar. He knew words and the syntax of sentences. Of sciences he was ignorant, for most of that was in the hands of the Kimber, the priesthood. The old men of the village retained merely a smattering.

Burke dismissed him disconsolately. He knew a little about the Kimber. They were the priesthood of Lolarth—had been the priesthood, rather. The last five thousand years of accumulated knowledge was in their hands. They had supplied armaments and weapons of all kinds for the world for uncounted years. For the past seventy years, they had not been heard from. They were guided now by a powerful leader who was displeased with the use humanity was making of science. The Kimber had withdrawn from civilization, taking all their secrets with them—and civilization had commenced to fall apart.

It had been years since any human being had seen a member of the Kimber. Lolarth desperately wanted the Kimber to return, to lead them out of the situation in which they found themselves.

In Lolarth, there was a fear of the dinosaurs who every year grew in number, and thundered across the humid plains and jungles in herds numbering in the billions.

If one Kimber ever returned to Lolarth, Verassa told Burke, that Kimber would own and rule Lolarth.

Verassa had been sad. "But no Kimber will return. It is said they have a secret city deep in the jungles where other men, and even dinosaurs, cannot go. They are hoping for humanity to die, for they believe the minds of humanity to be diseased with lusts that cannot be erased. Then they will start the world over again."

THE bipedomobile took giant strides at the head of the army that came down out of the mountains that day. Giant strides, but leisurely ones, for the army was entirely on foot.

A fierce exultation beat in Burke Donlevy's breast as he guided his fantastic, legged machine down precipitous paths. So they'd told him he was no good for war, eh? So they'd told him he'd never walk again, eh? He laughed with an inward joyousness. Here he was, if not in actual command of an army, at least in the front lines. And he was walking!

Jamie Sutherland—Brisil—sat on a

foot stool on the floor of the bipedomobile, slightly behind Burke. She was gazing steadily ahead, far into the distance. Her eyes were shaded by her long dark lashes. Her crimson lips were parted, in a sort of barbaric eagerness. Barbaric! That was the word which described her, which made her that shade different from the tender, loving Jamie Sutherland he had known.

At the foot of the mountains, on the edge of the humid jungle, Burke was surprised to see another encampment—another army, of ten thousand or more. But they were ready to march, and Burke did not stop the machine. Jamie now stood up and directed him through a break in the jungle.

Soft, commanding words escaped her lips. "Faster!" It was the first time she had spoken to him in Lolarthian. "It will be two days' march to Lolarth. You will run your wonderful machine forward, seek out paths for my army to follow."

All through that day Burke scouted out safe paths for the army to follow. And it was an army that grew! Here a thousand, there ten thousand men joined the ranks.

Burke avoided swampy regions, avoided vast herds of dinosaurs.

The sun sank, and the army camped on a vast, grassy plain. Burke, after wandering around the encampment for awhile, returned to his bipedomobile. He stopped. Jamie was leaning back against the curving body of the machine, her face visible only as dark hollows of shadow which the flooding silver moonlight created. Her lips were parted, her eyes glowed with vitality. Burke felt a sudden pang in his breast, a sudden overflowing of tenderness.

"Jamie!" The word burst from him hoarsely, pleadingly. He wanted to call back a deeply buried—a seemingly hopelessly buried memory of herself. But even as he spoke he knew he had failed.

She searched his face with lidded eyes. "You have called me that name before," she said. "Why?"

Burke hunched a step closer. "Because," he said burningly, "that is your name. Jamie Sutherland! You are the girl I love. Haven't you seen it in my face, Jamie, you who call yourself Brisil? Haven't you seen me back in Luthor-el, the new Luthor-el, watching you and hoping for you to notice me—to notice me the way you did when we were back there in the twentieth century?"

"I do not understand."

"You must understand! By God, they have killed the something in you that was Jamie. It's a monstrous, obscene trick that has been played on us, Jamie!" His hands came out in a crazy gesture; he almost lost his balance. "I love you! I don't know what sense there is in this crazy drama across time—I don't understand one fraction of the utterly damnable truth. Why haven't you noticed me? Granted that you are Brisil, why didn't my bipedomobile stir curiosity in you?"

"You will have to talk slower. Your accent is vile."

"You understood English at one time!" Burke panted.

A frigid disproval grew on her lips. "I never spoke any tongue but the tongue of Lolarth," she said coldly. She spoke measuredly, to enable him to understand her. Then she smiled. "You said you loved me?" she whispered.

BURKE groaned. She came closer, and a barely perceptible flavor that she carried on her closely molded clothing hung on the air about her. Burke's arms half raised, in a tortured desire to clasp her to him. And such, indeed, seemed to be her purpose. The moon was pendant in her glorious, inviting eyes. Her breath sounded softly and quickly and the warmth of her body touched at his. There was a mocking, challenging expression on her darkened face, and finally, when he held himself from her, she smiled slowly, deridingly.

"So I am your Jamie, whom you loved," she said mockingly. She moved back and away from him, leaned against the door of the bipedomobile. Her eyes lidded. Her voice hardened. "Know that I am Brisil, queen of Lolarth, Burke Donlevy! And none other than she! Is this Jamie a figment? No matter. My story, then, is common knowledge to all this vast army. You are a hero to them."

"A hero," Burke muttered uncomprehendingly.

"They know that you rescued me from the swamp. They worship you. If you had not been steeped in your self-pity you would have noticed it."

Her lip curled.

Burke's face grew hot. "Self-pity?" he grated.

She gestured scornfully at his crutches. "They were ready to smile at you, to talk with you—if you had been ready with an answering smile of your own. But it seemed to them, so they say, that you wished to stay within yourself. Verassa, a wonderful scholar, was not pleasantly treated at the first, you remember."

"I didn't—" Burke began; and then subsided. His shoulders slumped. "Don't taunt me, Jam—Brisil. God knows I can't stand much more of seeing you and knowing that I mustn't kiss you. I've been worried about you—that's the reason I've been a—a sourpuss. Just—just tell me your story, and I'll play that you aren't Jamie."

She told him the events that led to the present. It was a brief tale, because it was an old tale. The old story of the strife for political power. The prime minister of Lolarth, Jern Teermas, had long desired to control Lolarth, and, in controlling Lolarth, to dictate to a world. Brisil, the queen, had frowned on his radical, cruel measures to grind a people under his heel, and had threatened him with impeachment.

JERN TEER-MAS neither reformed nor was impeached. For one night Brisil was seized upon in her own bed, bound and gagged, and flown thousands of miles out over the dreadful swamplands in one of the few airplanes which the Kimber had left in the city.

She had been dropped in the dead of night, her parachute landing her up to her neck in swamp-water.

"I lived through that night. I would have died the next day if you had not come upon the scene, and for that I thank the Concentric Spheres of the Kimber."

Concentric spheres! Somehow that phrase touched a chord of memory in Burke's brain. But he couldn't track it down to its source.

She concluded her story. Her one burning desire was to regain control of Lolarth. She had asked Burke to take her to the mock-city of Luthor-el. Some of her royal relatives ruled the village and many surrounding villages.

Burke couldn't help injecting a bitter comment concerning the youth who had embraced her. She smiled languidly on Burke, without sympathy.

"We are to wed."

He groaned. "This is a mad story, Jamie! It couldn't have happened to you. Yes, yes, I know—you *think* you are Brisil, but you can't be." He desperately searched beneath her lidded eyes, trying to find a more than physical proof that she was not what she said. She was to wed. How could all this have happened?

He blurted out, "Don't you remember Dinakki? Don't you remember my house where you stayed? In the twentieth century?"

"I know Dinakki, of course," she stated. "When I was queen of Lolarth, he was my personal secretary and confidante. He was cast out of the city by Jern Teer-mas also. Luckily, he found his way to a nearby village, and I later found him there when my relatives and I paid a visit to discover if that village would participate in a war against Lolarth."

"Dinakki," said Burke fiercely, "is a traitor."

She stroked down the golden curve of her hair with both hands, and made no effort to hurry with her answer.

"You would have a hard time making me believe that, Burke Donlevy."

"He was in the twentieth century with you! He sought to kidnap you and failed."

She laughed in amusement, but it was a puzzled amusement.

Little devils of madness began to hop and dance in Burke's brain. He was turning cold all over, his every blood cell yammering for insane answers to insane questions.

He said hoarsely, "Jamie—Brisil—you took me and my bipedomobile for granted. You showed no curiosity. Why?"

"Because I believed your bipedomobile, as you call it, to have been made by the Kimber. I believed you found the machine in a destroyed city, and used it."

"Didn't you think the bipedomobile might be useful in a military engagement? Didn't you think of taking the machine from me, and making others?"

"The mere fact that you and your machine are here with my army—" she made a broad gesture toward the flaming campfires which dotted the plain like a sea of stars "—is proof that I consider the machine of useful military value. As far as duplicating the machine, making others, that is an impossibility." Her voice was sad. "Only the Kimber know the secrets of forging and of metallurgy. And unless you were a Kimber—"

Her breath caught in her throat. A startled light flamed in her eyes.

Then she looked at his crutches. She relaxed.

"No," she uttered musingly. "No. You could not be of the Kimber."

THEN a silence fell between them; and there were only the raucous laughing voices of an army; and the coughing howls of numberless reptiles off in the swamps bordering the plain.

Silent though Burke was, his brain was seething, about to explode.

"You believe nothing I say?" he grated at last.

Jamie Sutherland—Brisil?—was silent, and looked at him only with a puzzled, hurt frown.

Burke cursed. He shunted himself forward a step. He grabbed her by the shoulders with cruel pressure, and shook her. "You'll believe me," he cried in torment. "By God, I'll take you into the future with me—"

He was suddenly hurled back.

A huge bony hand had come between him and Jamie, placed itself on Burke's chest and pushed. Burke found himself saved from falling only by the spongy fern behind him.

Dinakki said coldly, "Stand back, fool."

Brisil said, "Thank you, Dinakki. Please escort me to my tent."

They left. Burke slid down to the ground, his back against the fern. His thoughts whirled. He began to wonder: Is it *I* who has been given the false memory, and not Jamie? He remembered the hypodermic.

But he knew then that that was not the answer. There was another solution. Perhaps Brisil was Brisil, and, though she seemed to be Jamie down to the smallest detail, was really not Jamie at all?

CHAPTER IX

THE bipedomobile was the eye of the army. It forged ahead, seeking reliable by-passes around treacherous swamplands, avoiding herds of dinosaurs which numbered in the millions, now and again darting miles to one side at Brisil's instruction, to pick up a waiting contingent from other surrounding villages.

The bipedomobile zig-zagged and back-tracked across a steaming world. The army marched straight ahead and toward that last citadel of civilization, Lolarth. Lolarth, the Mighty—and the dead.

Burke shuddered. Was this army to destroy Lolarth, to destroy civilization, to be the direct cause of man's loss of his heritage for all those uncounted millions of years before his history was at last to be revealed in some caves in France?

How would this army fight?

They had sticks and clubs and slings and catapults and spears and bows and arrows; they had knives and long wicked broadswords; they had, in pitifully small percentage, some ray-guns, the double-lensed weapon; they had three cannon rays, delicate machines wheeled swiftly along; of the artillery of Burke's time, of rifles, guns, they had and knew nothing.

The Kimber, the scientific priesthood, had taken almost all scientific and military knowledge with them.

Burke hoped that Lolarth was as badly equipped, as badly trained for defense as this army was for offense.

Behind the bipedomobile came an army of four hundred thousand fighting men.

A vast number, this was. Did they, then, intend to assault and batter down the resistance of mighty Lolarth by mere overwhelming numbers alone?

Burke glanced at Brisil. Her glance was serenely barbaric. An eagerness burned in her, an eagerness to sight Lolarth, an eagerness to overthrow Jern Teer-mas, the usurper. Did she realize that some of her people, her own soldiers in Lolarth, might well be killed so that she could regain her throne?

And early on the third morning, they sighted Lolarth.

BURKE'S breath caught in his throat. Here was heart-aching glory, a glory that had vanished in the dawn of the world. Lolarth lay in the heart of a valley, a long narrow valley laced on either side by low hills. And looking down upon Lolarth, Burke wondered how such a tremendous monument to the labor of man would ever be humbled to nothingness. Lolarth was a walled city, but here and there at frequent intervals, settlements had grown over the walls, and like trailing vines extended up and down the valley for two and three miles.

The buildings were massive in construction, and shone with a wet redness.

The farther side of the city was so distant that a cloying mist overhung its ramparts.

Lolarth was the metropolis of a world. Burke judged that perhaps its population, if computed, would touch at two or three million.

Burke's bipedomobile was on the brow of a low hill, overlooking Lolarth. The army was in concealment.

Brisil stood up, bending her head away from the prexiglass cupola. She gripped Burke's hand in a painful convulsion.

"Lolarth!" she said huskily. "I would trade my soul for the salvation of my glorious city from Jern Teer-mas. Come now, Burke Donlevy. Down behind the hill again. We make ready for our assault on my stolen kingdom!"

BRISIL left the bipedomobile, and Burke watched her activities hollowly. Fierce warriors, bearded and smoothly shaven, old and young, gathered about her in conference. One by one they departed to make the braves of their various tribes ready for the conflict, to fit their units into the fighting force that would humble the city.

The young warrior whom Brisil had claimed was to be her husband came hurriedly toward her. He was heaped high with armor and weapons which might have become Jeanne d'Arc. These he dropped with a clatter and then assisted Jamie—Brisil—to don.

Minutes later, she was swinging a light broadsword with all the gusto of a man.

At her left hip was a double-lensed weapon, but it was clear that she scorned it, for she accepted it only under protest.

She lifted the visor of her shockingly out-of-date protection and looked at Burke coolly.

"I lead my army into battle," she said. "Would your Jamie have done that?"

He thought of Jamie. No, no, she wouldn't. He shook his head helplessly.

Her eyes, barely visible, were grim. "I am a fool to do so. I may lose in death what I fight for in life. . . . Forget this Jamie, Burke Donlevy. You have a sick mind."

Burke said, "I wish I could fight at your side."

She said, "Your duty will be just as perilous. There are seven airplanes in Lolarth, the airplanes left us by the Kimber long years ago. They will attack my army and may perchance destroy it. You must destroy the airplanes with your chatter weapon. Goodbye!"

"Goodbye," Burke said after her retreating form.

It was clear that he was free to plan his own course of action.

The army split into three units, two to lose themselves right and left in the hills girdling the valley, the third to march down the center of the valley, in full view, inviting attack.

This third unit Burke made his own.

The thrill of the coming combat, the electric excitement that rippled through that vast concourse of dawn men, permeated Burke's brain, washed away all thought of the maddening puzzles that had beset him since his entrance into this lost world. Captain Burke Donlevy was a soldier again, and there was an objective to gain.

WAS Lolarth slumbering?

No!

Lolarth was alive with knowledge of her enemies. An insect flung itself in a mad spiral straight up into the sky above Lolarth. A powerful black insect—an airplane! And another three followed after it.

They hung poised against the blue, deadly, buzzing wasps, intelligent, and thinking where to strike first.

Lolarth was still a half mile distant, but those airplanes, with their churning, beating black wings, were visible for what they were.

Also visible, suddenly, were the blue-clad soldiery of Lolarth who appeared on the staunch, red-rock walls. Appeared there by the hundreds and by the thousands—and gave hint of those defenders who were not to be seen.

Arterial blood pounded thuddingly in Burke's temples. This was madness. There was no way to succumb Lolarth, not with this point-blank assault.

He knew a terrible fear for Brisil. Her armies would close in on Lolarth's flanks like a nut-cracker. But would Lolarth crack?

"*Perbus! Quel-el!* Forward! On the double, now!"

The savage command started in the van of the third unit, and rippled back from commander to commander. Men broke into wild warlike cries, that thundered up the valley as if the valley were a funnel. They commenced to run, their short legs impelling them at a mad pace through the lush grasses.

For the soldiery on the walls was jumping to the ground, rank after rank forming there and surging foward, in wave upon wave, unending thousands.

Burke kept his bipedomobile in the rear. He felt suddenly absurd on his steed. This was medieval war, with a few anachronistic ray-guns and airplanes thrown in. His metal steed should be prancing nervously.

Instead it walked smoothly forward, keeping up with the army—the army that swiftly was approaching another that was just as murderously inclined.

The airplanes hanging above Lolarth decided on their objectives. One plunged on a steep slant downward. Burke in fascination plotted its path, as it plunged without abatement at the van of the third unit.

Burke stiffened. This was war, but what happened was revolting. A beam that was as distinct as bright sunlight shining on dust lanced from the nose of the plane when it was a bare fifty feet above the heads of the army. Men screamed, and tried to scatter away from the path—the path of scorched, ruined flesh—that that thundering plane created.

After a second, that plane swooped up and away.

But another was on the way down.

THE front lines were in rout. They were in no condition to battle the defending armies. Burke saw disorganization spreading like poison. He burst into a wild, animal snarl. His fingers played over his instrument board. The bipedomobile roared into violent life, hurled itself forward in thirty-foot strides, dodging, hurtling over, senseless soldiers who were seeking to escape the air menace.

Burke put the bipedomobile into the path of the approaching destruction. He locked the controls, grabbed at the machine gun and swung it up, sighting at the nose of the approaching plane as its beam of death came toward him.

He knew a moment of unbelief that he should put himself into this suicidal trap. Two engines of war, one a land, one an air machine were impelling themselves toward each other, each spouting its own virulent death.

Machine gun against death ray!

Suddenly Burke knew that this encounter would decide which side should lose the battle for Lolarth.

The plane thundered toward him, its sharp destroying beam about to touch at the bipedomobile.

Burke poured lead from the machine gun. And suddenly the nose of the approaching plane burst into flame. Its death ray disappeared. The whole plane tipped to one side, turned a full loop, then turned straight up and up—in a circle that ended up with the ground.

Terrific yellow flames burst around the plane before it exploded.

Burke burst into an unrestrained yell

of joy. But not for long. Behind him he heard the approaching thunder of the other plane's motor.

He was frantic as he swung the cupola on its geared runway. He was in time though, for, in seconds under his assault, this second plane was down!

Burke heard the roar of triumph of the thousands of men who had seen that spectacle. Everywhere, men were reforming into their ranks, were reoganizing to do battle with the defending armies of Lolarth. Pennants rose again, waved, swords glinted, ray guns sent their searing beams—morale was back again!

AND as that bloody day passed, Burke was a fantastic creature on a fantastic machine, plunging into one strong spearpoint in the enemy's line, chopping it down with a burst of fire. For the airplanes of Lolarth had long since proved their inability to cope with the bipedomobile. The death ray they spewed from their wicked noses was effective only when it could concentrate itself over a distance of fifty feet. And any plane that got within fifty feet of Burke's machine guns was done for.

But three planes remained at the end of that night when a full moon hung weirdly on the horizon. A full moon that looked down on a barbaric scene of carnage. The two arms of Brisil's "nut-cracker" had come down from the hills, were swiftly squeezing more tightly on the beleaguered city. The plexiglass cupola of the bipedomobile was riddled through with gaping, jagged holes. A long red welt was smeared across Burke's face. But despite this, he fought on.

. . . Fought on until he saw a sight that tinged his face with the white of horror. Tinged it whiter than the light of the full, pendant moon tinged it . . . a full moon which, though he knew it not, was shortly to make him into a creature that would cause two armies to look upon him with a strange awe—

"Jamie!"

He saw her in a swirl of madly battling warriors. Saw her warriors leap ahead with the swift yells of the victor. Jamie with her sword had contributed to that victory. Jamie who scorned the double-lensed weapon at her side. Had she used it, instead of depending on her sword alone, she might have averted her dreadful fate. But the Lolarthian whose sword point had found the chink in her armor—the armor which concealed her face, but did not protect her soft, lovely body—had his head burned away by one of Jamie's—Brisil's—men before he could know of his triumph.

Jamie was left alone while her warriors went forward.

Jamie fell.

The grief of a terrible fear blanked Burke's mind out for a few seconds. Then he found himself at her side, holding up her head, wrenching her helmet from her head, and releasing the golden flood of her hair.

"Jamie!" he cried softly. "Jamie! Oh God! Talk—speak to me!"

The incredible sounds of battle were suddenly drifting into the distance. The full moon shone brightly. . .

Her eyes opened, and they were already tired, tired with puzzling over the mystery of death.

"I go now, Burke Donlevy," she murmured laxly. "I am done. I long for a priest, now, so that I may make my last obeisance to the Concentric Spheres which are the All in All."

Tears poured unashamedly down his smudged face. He was trembling violently. She was dying. Oh, God, she was dying! This was incredible. Not Jamie, not his Jamie, whom he loved and whom he would never stop loving, come eternity and the crack of doom.

Jamie, Jamie, recognize me before you go; tell me you are Jamie, and not some other thing. . . .

"Burke!" she gasped. "Burke! Not . . . *you!*"

His heart beat wildly. She knew him, his own Jamie. And then he knew that it was not so! Jamie was looking not at him, but at a pulsing radiance which had grown like magic on his breast.

A radiance! Swelling spheres of concentric brilliance which spun through his chino khaki shirt, expanding, bursting upward to light the landscape for thirty feet around. They came streaming from his breast, from his body, without warmth, without sensation, round halos of fire upon which the dying warrior girl looked with awful fascination.

She panted wildly, "*You!* I did not suspect it. Oh, Burke Donlevy, in the light of the full moon will they reveal themselves. Now I die, and I know that my city will be well ruled, for you will rule it. You, the king of Lolarth! You—a *Kimber!*"

THE word was like a spinning emery wheel which touched at his brain and threw off agonizing sparks of thought. A Kimber! He, a Kimber! How? Why? But even as he asked hiimself the question, he knew the answer. He remembered the hairy stranger who had died in his arms in the swampland. He remembered the pendant which the strange one had owned, and which Burke had put around his own neck. . . .

The Concentric Spheres of the Kimber!

They flooded from him . . . in the light of the full moon . . . the full moon, which released a vibration, an electro-magnetic influence, that reacted with the substance of the pendant, or some incredibly minute machinery within the pendant, and so the brilliant Spheres, sign of the Kimber, were created. . . .

His gaze was numb, tortured. His brain had gone beyond coherent thought.

The girl grasped his arms with dying strength.

"Rule Lolarth for me!" she begged. "Ahhh—"

She stopped. Then her head turned to one side. She whispered weakly, "Come, Dinakki. Kneel here."

And Dinakki suddenly was there. Burke looked upon him, knowing a sudden blaze of anger that he should be here, when he wanted to be alone in his grief.

Dinakki's eyes were lidded, were directly on the center point of the spheres which came from Burke's breast.

He said in a monotone, "Victory will soon be ours, my queen."

And she said, "I know. It could not be otherwise. Dinakki, take the hand of this Kimber, and vow your loyalty forever. I, your queen, command it. Lolarth will be saved . . . a Kimber has at last returned!"

Burke stooped over her, waiting for a recurrence of her whispering voice. Then he slowly allowed her head to fall back on the aureate pillow of her hair.

"Jamie," he whispered brokenly. "Jamie."

He raised haggard eyes to Dinakki. "You didn't take my hand."

"No," said Dinakki. He sneered and rose. He stood in a listening attitude for a long time. Around them there were only dead bodies and a bloody landscape. Beyond in the city there were the clashing roars of battle.

Dinakki said, "Our men are within the walls, and the battle will not last long. I came to find my queen. Well, no matter. The battle will last less long if you, the King of Lolarth, enter."

"You mean—?"

"Exactly. Are you not a Kimber?"

BURKE knew the question was sarcastic. He was perfectly aware that Dinakki knew he was not a Kimber. And he knew, suddenly, that Dinakki was intending to use him for his own ends. Oh God! Maddening questions flowed in on him again, maddening doubts. Brisil had told him Dinakki had been her personal secretary. Brisil, who was—Jamie?

Suddenly he buried his face in his hands. Then he raised it again. "I'll play along with you, Dinakki," he gritted. "The devil only knows what awful game you're playing. But get this! I'm a Kimber, and you won't find anybody who knows any different. I'm going to rule Lolarth. I'm going to imprison Jern Teer-mas. Then—then so help me, I'm going to get to the bottom of all the horrible mysteries of this time if it kills me!"

Dinakki was laughing silently, sneeringly. "Agreed, your majesty," he said smoothly. "May I suggest, however, that I ride in the bipedomobile with you, so that when we enter the city you may go through the proper motions of securing your kingship, in the manner of a true Kimber?"

Burke nodded numbly. He would have to have a guide, and it was plain that Dinakki contemplated no treachery . . . yet.

Before he went he cast one last look on the dead girl. A tortured sob caught in his throat. She was Jamie. She could be nobody else but Jamie. And the perfect lips of Jamie would never smile again. . . .

BURKE Donlevy entered Lolarth in his legged machine. The Concentric Spheres of the Kimber still studded out from his breast—flowed forth even more brilliantly than they had at first.

The bipedomobile was halfway to the heart of the city before Dinakki pointed out the first fierce skirmish going on ahead. Men were howling, swords were clanking. A canon-ray machine was drawn up, blazing away with its solid golden fire. But suddenly the defenders of a street intersection saw the bipedomobile, saw Burke.

The aftermath was terrifying. Most of the defenders stopped fighting on the instant.

A wailing, screaming cry went up, "A Kimber!"

They dropped their weapons, dropped to their knees, and salaamed without regard for their fierce attackers, who leaped forward with savage cries and slew them where they knelt. This did not last long, though. The hillmen, many of whom Burke had saved from the winged planes outside the city, suddenly saw the tell-tale sign of his priesthood. Their weapons clattered. In another few moments, the battle had ceased, and Burke was sternly speaking through holes in his shattered plexiglass cupola.

"The battle for the city of Lolarth will cease! I, a Kimber, have come to rule you. You will spread through the city now, telling of my coming. Go!"

They went, attackers and attacked alike, suddenly united, running off, side by side.

Dinakki said in satisfaction, "It is all that is needed, Burke Donlevy." He laughed thinly. "You will be king, now. Proceed down the avenue, walking the bipedomobile slowly. And let us hope that the Concentric Spheres continue to burn as brightly as ever!"

Burke caught his breath. He need not have feared. In the next hour, the Concentric Spheres flamed and glowed and pulsed and grew in brilliance. The bipedomobile walked down the avenue, slowly, as Dinakki suggested; walked down an avenue that began to overflow with the population of Lolarth!

People; warriors, women, children, stood on the walks and wept for very joy. All battle was gone, victor and vanquished were indistinguishable, for all had been longing for the return of a Kimber, for a Kimber, who would save them from their decadent ways, who would lead them out of the barbaric sludge in which they wallowed, who would save them from the terror of the dinosaurs who might one day overrun their city.

Burke felt a tight pang of shame. He was an impostor! And yet, he was suddenly joyful. Jamie—Brisil—had asked him to rule Lolarth. It had been her dying request. She wanted her people to be happy. Well, Burke would do just that little thing! He might not be a Kimber, maybe, but if these people wanted science, he guessed he knew enough and could get enough to start their civilization humming again.

It was the last thing he could do for Jamie, who, in some utterly mad way, had been queen.

His shoulders went back. Dinakki continued to direct him, still slowly. Burke shortly saw why. At the end of the avenue, after three whole hours, they came to a low pyramid. Burke almost stopped the machine, but Dinakki fiercely prodded him on. The bipedomobile took high, easy steps upward, and at last came to the summit. Burke saw an ornately wrought throne, flanked on either side by gold-bedecked warriors. These warriors trained their shiny weapons on a man who was sitting in the throne. While the bipedomobile had been proceeding up the avenue, preparations for a strange coronation had been made.

"But—but who is the man in the chair?" Burke whispered.

Dinakki said dryly, "Jern Teer-mas!"

JERN TEER-MAS was a dark, fanatically eyed wiry little man. Blank terror was in his close-set eyes. He glued his eyes to Burke's.

Suddenly he broke. "Save me! Save me!" he cried piteously.

He trembled violently.

"Say nothing!" Dinakki whispered. "Get out now—quickly!"

Burke got from the bipedomobile, and almost forgot his crutches. He stood for a whole moment on his own two legs. For a wild giddy moment, he imagined his legs had recovered their power to hold him erect. Then he knew it was illusion! His knees started to buckle. He grabbed at his crutches.

Dinakki urged him forward until both men stood facing Jern Teer-mas.

Below the pyramid uncounted thousands of people were massed. Burke heard their ghastly shout.

"Slay him! Slay Jern Teer-mas!"

An old, gold-robed man now came up to Burke, recited gibberish from a parchment.

He ended abruptly, in words Burke could understand:

"What is your decision for Jern Teer-mas?"

Burke looked at the terrified, evil creature.

Jern Teer-mas suddenly came erect. He pointed a trembling finger at Dinakki. "Watch him!" he screamed in awful fear. "Do not permit him. He will try to get rid of me, for I will accuse him—"

Dinakki acted before anyone could stop him.

The ray gun at his hip came flashing up.

Its terrible yellow beam of fire lanced at Jern Teer-mas' scrawny body. A black hole appeared in his chest. There was a frying smell.

And, Burke knew afterward, nobody seemed anxious to make a move to stop Dinakki's murder of a helpless man! They simply looked on. They saw Jern Teer-mas' dead body roll to the edge of the platform, saw Dinakki give the limp body a kick which sent it rolling down the pyramid stairs—and into the hands of the mob!

Burke was petrified with horror.

Then he turned on Dinakki.

"You—you fool!" he raged in English. "You exceed your right. I am king of Lolarth! By God, he was probably the one man who could clear up this mystery for me—unless *you* could! I'll have you flayed alive, Dinakki—"

Dinakki paid him no attention. He raised his hands. The mob, which had received the body of Jern Teer-mas and was tearing it to pieces, now ceased its roars.

Dinakki cried, "Your new king heeds the demands of his people! I, Dinakki, your new prime minister, have executed the tyrant in compliance with the order of your new king!"

The mad roar of exultant approval that erupted from the crowd was deafening. But Burke, appalled to the depths of his being, knew that Dinakki had cleverly wedged himself into a position of affluence with these barbaric people.

Dinakki said in English, his horse-teeth visible as he smoothly smiled, "You see? I have done that which causes the people to worship you, their new king!"

"And made yourself their prime minister and my right-hand man whether I wanted it that way or not!" Burke hotly flared. "It seems to me that these people slough off or take on new rulers mighty damned fast!"

Dinakki's eyes smoldered with his suddenly secret thoughts. Then he straightened.

"Face the throne!" he whispered fiercely. "The coronation ceremony will begin! I will tell you what to do in your English language, and thus no one will know that you are not really a Kimber!"

Burke Donlevy's thoughts were not on the meaningless gibberish of that ceremony in the next hour. Unconsciously, he followed Dinakki's whispered instructions, blankly listened to the hocus-pocus recited by the gold-robed ancient and was only vaguely aware of the spasmodic screams and roars of joy emitted by the solid mass of human flesh below the pyramid.

He was wondering what the future held in store for him. A future in which there was no Jamie.

But one thing he did know, he told himself fiercely. As soon as it was possible, he was going to ferret out the answers to all the insane puzzles that plagued him. Now that he was king, he would tear Lolarth apart if he had to to learn the solution!

CHAPTER XI

AND within a half-hour after the jewel-shot gold helmet, the emblem of kingship, was placed on his black-haired head, Burke found himself installed in his suite in the royal palace, and alone.

A palanquin had been brought and Burke and Dinakki had been carried away to the palace amid the deliriously happy roar of a million and more people.

The bipedomobile had been left on top of the pyramid. But Burke had the satisfaction of seeing it guarded by two of the blue-uniformed soldiery of Lolarth.

And so he stood in his suite. A horrible suspicion clouded his mind. Dinakki and he had been separated for fifteen minutes. And somehow, he wanted to keep track of Dinakki, particularly until he found out how to circumvent any tricks that Dinakki might pull.

He pulled a bell-cord savagely.

A guard appeared in the door almost immediately.

"Yes, your majesty." The fellow's eyes were wide on the concentric circles of light which still flowed from Burke's swelling chest; wide with religious awe.

Burke snapped, "See that my prime minister is escorted here immediately. Inform him that it is my royal request that he appear before me!"

"Yes, your majesty! I will see to it, O Holy One!"

Burke stood erect on his crutches. A mighty sense of well-being was flowing through him. He almost felt that he could feel sensation in his paralyzed legs! That was nonsense, of course. But he smiled with joyous savagery.

He was king! He wasn't any helpless invalid any more. He owned a city, and his word was law. His mind fled back over the incredible adventures that had ended in this triumphant success. His lips tightened. By God, Dinakki was going to give—or Burke would make some despotic fireworks!

And then Dinakki entered.

THERE was a disdainful, arrogant smile on his lips. To left and right were two guards. Burke felt a slight shiver. These guards did not look upon the Concentric Spheres of the Kimber with much reverence. Why?

Well, now was the time to prove whether he was king or not.

"Guards!" he rapped out. "Leave my presence at once—and close the door behind you!"

For a moment his heart was in his mouth; but then he knew his fears were truly unreasonable. The guards left; the door soughed softly shut.

"Well?" said Dinakki. He sneered. "Shall we speak in English or in Lolarthian? With the latter tongue, you are still ignorant of all save the most meager, common vocabulary, and your accent is all off."

Burke shunted himself forward a step. "English!" he rasped. He allowed his overwhelming hatred for this dark-skinned man to show in his eyes. "Now we're going to have a showdown, Dinakki. I've wanted one ever since you played me for a sucker back—forward—in the twentieth century. You're — going to — put — your — cards—on the table!" He accented each word as if his voice were a trip-hammer driving it deep into Dinakki's brain.

Dinakki's expression did not change, save that an amazed amusement grew in his eyes.

"A showdown, eh?" He barked the word. And suddenly he was laughing. "You fool, Burke Donlevy!" he cried. "You haven't suspected the truth. You haven't considered it. You don't even understand why I hate you—hate you so that the very sound of your name is acid on my soul! By the Cencentric Spheres of my religion I hate you!"

His laughter now had something horrible in it, something utterly bestial. He advanced a step, eyes glowing.

"That month when I served Jamie Sutherland in your home in the twentieth century. That first time I saw Jamie Sutherland—and knew that I loved her!"

Burke's face drained. "Loved her?" he echoed.

"And could not touch her, knowing that I must deliver her to Jern Teermas. I loved her, you hear? I still love her. And for a solid month to hear on her lips *your* name, and to see the lovelight in her eyes when she spoke of *you*, with never more than a glance for me—how could a red-blooded man stand it?"

He was shaking. Burke looked at him, appalled.

Dinakki went on, horribly, "And so I hated you. It was an obsession. And when I received the letter you had written to my lovely one—to my Jamie—I laughed because you were crippled—because you were tortured—because you knew that Jamie would no longer want you!"

He echoed the crazy, agonized laugh which he might have employed at that moment, his face distorted with his passion.

Burke's face flamed. A hot, scalding fury was his; fury that this beast should taunt him.

"You opened the letter I sent to Jamie!" he said thickly.

He knew he could stand no more. Everything had crumbled inside him. An old wound had not only been opened but salt had been rubbed into it. He drew the Luger he habitually carried and knew that he would shoot to kill.

Dinakki, hands on his hips, laughed. "Fool!" he cried. "Do you think that I am without support in Lolarth? Do you think that I allowed you your pitiful kingship so that you could keep it? I gave it to you so that I could wrench it away from you! *Guards!*"

He clapped his hands on the last word.

And from the tapestries billowing about the walls of Burke's suite, a dozen blue-clad guardsmen appeared, ray-guns and arrows trained squarely on Burke's body.

Dinakki's voice snapped out again, this time with a repressed glee.

"Bring in the girl?"

The curtains parted again, and a girl was thrust into the room. She stumbled a little, so hard was she shoved. Then she drew herself erect, and her eyes melted into those of the "king" of Lolarth.

An expression of utter joy transfigured her lovely features.

"Burke!" she cried. *"Burke!* Oh, my dear one, you've come for me at last!"

The girl was—

—Jamie Sutherland!

CHAPTER XII

BURKE experienced a sensation directly opposite to that of fainting. Every blood vessel in his body constricted, narrowed; and through those suddenly tight channels the blood gushed with a pounding, mountainous roar. A cataract of sound fogged out every thought in the world save that directly connected with the impossible vision that confronted him.

Jamie Sutherland was Brisil.

Brisil was dead.

Things equal to the same thing are equal to each other and so dead equals Jamie Sutherland.

He stretched out his numb arms. "Jamie!" he said brokenly. "Jamie! You live after all!"

And she came to him. His arms were around her, and her tears were wet on his cheeks as he kissed her, everywhere on her face. Then she moved back from him, babbling, "Burke, Burke, I didn't think you'd ever come. I've longed for you so, Burke—"

She kissed him again, as if she would never get enough of him. And so great was her love that though she must have noticed the circles of light, must have noticed his crutches, she did not show her cognizance of them.

Burke forgot everything else in the ecstacy of that reunion until—until Jamie was suddenly taken from him. Wrenched away by two guards, who drew her to a point beside the venom-eyed Dinakki.

"So you love each other," he whispered.

Jamie noticed him for the first time. "Why—why—" she grasped, paling, her white hand at her bare throat. "How on Earth . . . Dinakki! How did you —"

She gasped, then whirled on Burke. "Oh, my dear one," she sobbed, "what has happened? It seems so terrible. Everything seems wrong. Dinakki was my butler—your butler—"

Burke stood rigid, fighting for control of himself. "Everything is wrong," he said in tones that seemed to emanate from an infinity of distance. "But I'm beginning to see some of the truth. No wonder Dinakki showed up on the very day my other butler died in an automobile accident. It was Dinakki who arranged that accident!"

And Dinakki smiled. "True," he agreed in oily smooth tones. "It was I who arranged much. I who plotted to secure the throne of Lolarth. I who have at last succeeded!"

He crossed to Burke with long stride, his stiff, snake-skin garment rustling to the rhythm of his step. His hand darted out, ripped the light-rippling pendant from around Burke's neck.

"Now," Dinakki smirked, "I am the Kimber—and you are a helpless fool! But a fool that I hate. Ah, you will know pain before you die. Would you like to know why it is that you see Brisil—queen of Lolarth—Jamie Sutherland—alive before you?

"For, Burke Donlevy, Brisil and Jamie Sutherland are the same!"

Jamie stood helpless and bewildered, aware that something was horribly wrong, but unable to say what it was.

Burke said wearily, "No, Dinakki. I know better now. Brisil is—was—Brisil. She is dead. She was another person. And Jamie Sutherland was another person. They look alike. They're perfect twins, apparently, but —"

"There are no buts," insisted the traitor. "Brisil and Jamie Sutherland were the same person—but in two different times!"

"Eh?" Burke made the sound of astonishment, but even as he made it, the truth was coming home to him. It was like a blow—but there was no other answer.

He blurted, *"Jamie was a reincarnation of Brisil!"*

THE idea burst in his brain like a star-shell over a London that was millions of years distant in time. Dinakki did not give either Jamie or Burke any chance to recover from the eerie fact. He at once plunged into his monstrous tale of intrigue and counter intrigue, treachery and counter treachery, in which Burke Donlevy and Jamie Sutherland had been the innocent victims.

Jern Teer-mas had started the ball to rolling. Jern was an outcast Kimber, his Concentric Sphere pendant taken away from him. But he had escaped with much of the knowledge of the Kimber, had hidden it in a vault in the royal palace at Lolarth when he became Prime Minister under Brisil. For long years, he cherished the desire to rule Lolarth, but to do this, he would have had to have Brisil as his wife. Brisil scorned him, cut down his powers in the government, obviously mistrusted him.

Jern Teer-mas had plenty of cards

up his sleeve. Brisil's dynasty extended backward in time for a million years and more, so the secret records that he had stolen from the Kimber revealed. And now, looking over other records, Jern Teer-mas found the genealogical prediction-chart of Brisil's descendants. This prediction chart was based partly on mathematical averages and probabilities, partly on information the Kimber had received via time-machine.

The genealogical prediction-chart, among other interesting facts, had showed that in a year which was equal to our year of 1922 A.D., a girl would be born who would be the exact physical counterpart of Brisil, Queen of Lolarth!

Burke entirely forgot the deadly ray-guns and arrows leveled on him by Dinakki's men. He stared at Jamie in bewilderment. She was indeed Brisil's double! She wore her hair differently, upswept over her ears, her eyebrows were plucked—but outside of that, there was no discernible difference.

No difference save an inner difference, a gentility, a softness, a loving tenderness which Burke knew the barbaric Brisil did not possess in strong measure.

"It's—it's definitely possible!" he stammered at last, as much to comfort Jamie, to take away the stricken fear in her eyes, as to reassure himself as to his own sanity. "In a hundred million years, the improbability would be that there *shouldn't* be another Brisil. It would be impossible for the duplication, the reincarnation *not* to occur!"

Jamie's hazel eyes had a haunted, hunted look. She said helplessly, "And —and that's the reason Jern Teer-mas kidnapped me? Because I was Brisil physically, and the people wouldn't know the difference, and he could marry me and use me as a puppet queen?"

Dinakki's eyes were alive with an almost uncontrollable emotion as he returned Jamie's soft glance.

"Just that, my lovely one," he said throatily. "He sent one of his men forward to see if such a reincarnation did exist. It did! Jern Teer-mas then came to me, knowing that I was eager to improve my station in life—"

"You mean," Burke suddenly blazed, "you were eager to betray Brisil!"

DINAKKI stiffened with anger. Then he relaxed and leered with evil promise on Burke. He said, "Jern Teer-mas told me everything. He wanted me to go forward, secure a position in that distant civilization, and study Jamie Sutherland to make certain that she was a reincarnation of Brisil. For, being personal secretary to Brisil, I knew her as well as any; and besides that, I knew the English language—"

"What?" Burke burst the word out. "But how could you know that?"

Dinakki shrugged. "A simple thing," he said offhandedly. "Jern Teer-mas —" his face darkened with fury "— used to be my friend. He confided in me his past, and allowed me at times to roam the ages. On several occasions I brought back slaves from the future in the time-machine. One of these happened to be an American of your time. The language was such a simple thing compared to mine that it fascinated me to learn it in a few nights.

"But Jern Teer-mas was not my friend! He suspected me of wishing to hold the post if prime minister in Lolarth—"

Burke got the connection. He burst into a delighted, taunting laugh. "So that's it! He gave you the double double-cross! He got you into the future, not so much so that you could study Jamie's fitness for the role of Queen of Lolarth, but so he could get rid of you! Your confederate, the one who was running the time-machine, had instructions from Jern Teer-mas to abandon you in the twentieth century —which he did!"

The memory was obviously a humiliation to Dinakki. His face flamed with the outrage of Burke's taunt.

He stepped back, lifted his gaunt arm, pointing at Burke.

"Seize him, men!" he cried tensely. "He will be thrown into a place where he will live, and where he will writhe under my taunts. And from time to time, I shall bring Jamie, my wife, Queen of Lolarth for him to see—"

Jamie at last woke to life. Her lovely face whitened as she understood the full picture.

"No!" she cried in horror. "I won't. I won't ever marry you, you—beast! I couldn't ever—*ever* live with your poisoned, sadistic mind. Even when you were only my butler—Burke's butler—I sensed something awful about you—something depraved. And no wonder you are depraved—belonging to this terrible, decadent, barbaric race. I know you and your kind. Niggle told me—"

Her words were cut off by her own sobs. She flung herself into Burke's arms. Burke clasped her fervently, knowing that this was the last time he would hold her.

The next thing he knew, she was torn from his grip, and guards were coming at him also.

Burke's lips stretched in a fighting grin. He hurled himself at those who sought to detain him, hurled himself with a wild cry. He suspected it would be better to die now, fighting, rather than be captured.

He entirely forgot his crutches. For another of those moments of insane delight, he thought he had the use of his legs again! And it was another moment of illusion. His knees folded. He fell.

And the guards, three of them, flung themselves on him, as Dinakki's commanding voice rang out. Something hard crushed against his head, and his consciousness spiralled buzzingly down into an abyss which had one last coherent remembrance: Jamie's despairing, hopeless sob.

CHAPTER XIII

HIS head felt as if chickens were placidly clawing away inside. But of course there weren't any chickens in this lost eternity where the human race, against the facts of all scientific observation, actually existed. Or were there? And which came first, the chicken or the egg? The egg, naturally, because—

He groaned and rolled over and opened his eyes, stilling his idiotic thoughts. He was lying on a hard rock floor that was so thick with dust it was like a pad beneath him. Around him were glass-smooth walls, the curving walls of a circular pit.

The pit was perhaps eight feet in diameter. Set into one side flush with the dusty floor was a smooth metal door with a keyhole. There was no knob. Except for this door the pit was featureless.

The pit was not very deep. A little shallower than it was wide. Burke could see over the rim at an angle. Beyond the pit was the inner wall of the building, and in this wall was a window which provided the only source of illumination. Perhaps twenty feet above Burke was a dark, featureless ceiling.

Burke's breath caught in his throat

as he looked through the window. He saw the pyramid where he had been so ironically crowned "king" of Lolarth—and on the pyramid his bipedombile!

Tears burned in his eyes. The sight of his legged machine, almost his *friend,* awoke a longing emotion in him. Oh, God, if only he was in the bipedomobile and Jamie was at his side—!

He scrabbled to a sitting position against the wall, hugging his suddenly cold body. His teeth chattered with the full realization of the mess he'd made of things. Then he bit at his lip as a sudden idea came to him. He could escape from this pit. It was only six feet deep, and he could stretch his arms and reach the edge and draw himself over the top; and after that, he'd fight, fight until he dropped or until he won!

All he had to do was to stand up—

—stand up!

He buried his face in his hands as the awfulness of the torture that Dinakki had planned for him came home. But just then—

"Burke!"

His head snapped up. The voice was Jamie's! He felt a wild thrill of hope—but as he saw Jamie, a cold, quiet frenzy of disbelief touched at him.

It was not that Dinakki stood beside her looking down at him, his fists on his hips, his horse-teeth bared in a cruel delight; it was not that Dinakki's presence there meant that she had not come to help him escape. It was simply that this was a different Jamie, a horribly changed Jamie.

She was jeweled and painted like a court hussy, in skin-tight clothes that concealed all too little. Jewels hung pendant and glittering from her ears and powdered throat; swathed her wrists, studded her long fingers with the colored nails. And even from this distance, the perfumes she wore touched at Burke's nostrils with a sense-disturbing impact.

He stared at her in growing horror.

"Jamie!" he stammered. "Wha-what does this mean? Wh-why—"

He refused to credit the contemptuous smile she bent on him. She moved closer to Dinakki, molded her soft body against the hard outlines of his. He ostentatiously put his arm around her waist. Jamie bent on him a tender, cloying smile.

A HOARSE cry of horrible unbelief came from Burke. "Jamie," he groaned abjectly. "You haven't—you *couldn't* have gone over to his side!"

Her carmined lips pursed in angry irritation. "I have, though," she flared. She stamped her foot. "You wouldn't want me to chain myself to you—even if we were back in the twentieth century, would you? And you wouldn't want me to give up the chance Dinakki gives me, would you? Well, Burke—" and her voice suddenly broke, but in excitement, Burke knew "—Burke, I'm going to be queen of Lolarth. To the people I'll be Brisil—and I'll pose as Brisil—and together, Dinakki and I, we'll be great!"

"But—but you said—"

"Never mind what I said. I was distraught then. Dinakki talked to me afterward, told me how much he loved me. I know now he isn't the monster I thought he was. He's—he's great, and he's—he's fine, Burke. And so we are going to wed!"

Burke whispered, "But the people know Brisil is dead!"

Jamie tossed her head in scorn. "Do they? I showed myself on the balcony of my suite—about ten floors above your head, Burke—and they went mad at the sight of me and cried the name Brisil. They believe she lives."

Dinakki now spoke, his voice dripping smug satisfaction. "Of course they believe she lives. On the battlefield, a few soldiers saw her fall. Just a few. I myself commanded one of my trusted men to return to her side and bury her. Her death is a secret—and those few soldiers who saw her die will merely be spreading a rumor of her death. And such a rumor cannot live when the people see Brisil herself at my side."

He shrugged. "And they have already seen her at my side—already know that we are to wed. Already the people accept me as a Kimber, their rightful ruler, and I have convinced him that you were a false Kimber. When the people learned that their former queen was to be the wife of a ruling Kimber, their joy was boundless."

Burke sat in the dust, back against the wall, a filthy, bedraggled creature, his mind groping against the pain of the knife-thrust of Jamie's betrayal. But even through that pain he was wondering: *Is* it betrayal? Because the Jamie he had known back in the twentieth century was not the kind of girl to do a thing like this! Had Dinakki somehow changed her, hypnotized her, as Burke had imagined Brisil to be a hypnotized Jamie? His mind was tortured with doubts. He tried to look deep beneath Jamie's eyes, to see her very thoughts. If she had not really, voluntarily turned against him, he would not mind too much the death that seemed in store for him. But Jamie looked down on him without a trace of compassion.

He groaned inwardly. But in spite of his doubts, his mind was humming with answers and questions. Dinakki had stolen Burke's pendant at the height of its brilliance. Dinakki had chosen that time to impress upon the people that he was a true Kimber, for he knew that after the brilliant glory of the Concentric Spheres died away, such a task might be impossible.

How had he convinced them? Burke could well imagine. With their beloved queen Brisil at his side, silently backing up his statements, he could make them believe anything.

But why had Jern Teer-mas been so hated that the mob had demanded his death? Burke thought he understood. Jern Teer-mas had ruled Lolarth for two weeks after he had dropped Brisil into the swamplands. He had probably spread the word that Brisil was away on a visit to her royal relatives in Luthor-el, or some such place. For two weeks he had experimented with the people, to discern how they would react to his rulership. He had had Jamie all that time, had kept her under shelter? Such seemed the case. If the people proved unruly, he would bring Jamie out and make her pose as Brisil, and then would marry Jamie. He had never had the chance. Brisil's armies made a surprise attack on Lolarth.

True or not, it was a good enough theory to hold to until he found out differently. *If* he ever had the chance of finding out anything, of ever seeing the outside world again. . . .

DINAKKI went on talking, in a slow, indulgent voice, while Jamie, seemingly having forgotten the wretched creature in the pit, huddled close to him, and smiled tantalizingly at him with her full red lips. And as Dinakki talked, Burke realized the man was substantially agreeing with Burke's thoughts concerning his kingship of Lolarth, and Jern Teermas.

"The people hated Jern Teer-mas," Dinakki continued. "When you, a Kimber, entered Lolarth, they brought him to the pyramid for judgment. He was about to accuse me of having designs on the throne of Lolarth when I shot him. Does that clear your mind of all questions, Burke Donlevy? Because above all, I want your mind cleared—so that you can appreciate the excellent chance of freedom I have given you!"

Burke felt a tight fury about to explode within him.

"Excellent chance of freedom!" he panted. "You filthy beast, Dinakki. You've chosen on the one means of imprisoning me which would torture me the most—" He stopped, strangled by his rage, and his grief. His every cell was quivering with the whips that Jamie had goaded him. Her treachery was more than the mind could stand!

Dinakki assumed a hurt expression. "How you wrong me, Burke Donlevy! The pit is scarcely six feet deep. Almost any man could draw himself over the side. And once he did that, he need but leave the royal palace by the nearest exit—and would find himself free in Lolarth! How can you say that I torture you?"

And he burst into a huge, full-throated laugh, a laugh that roared through this lower level of the royal palace. It was Jamie who stopped him.

"Come, my—my Lord," she said huskily. "I—I am softer than you, and it pains me to see my former lover so helpless. Let us go."

Dinakki hastily patted her hand with his gaunt fingers. "Of course, my lovely one," he said tenderly. "It is this very softness of yours which makes you so wonderfully different from Brisil. Brisil was a barbarian, hard and unyielding, and she also would have laughed at this wretched creature. But let us go." He could not resist a final taunt as he led Jamie away, however. "You should have no trouble at all, Burke Donlevy—no trouble at all!"

Burke shook. He heard their diminishing footsteps—and then, suddenly, something struck him. Something hard, which bounced off his arm, and then raised a little cloud of dust as it struck the floor.

BURKE stared. His heart began to beat with heavy, far-spaced thumps against his ribs. A key, big, black, heavy, lay on the floor. A key—but it was more than a key to Burke. It was proof, welcome, cleansing proof that Jamie was play-acting, that she was fooling Dinakki, that she loved Burke!

He snatched up the key and held it with trembling fingers. Jamie, walking away from the pit with Dinakki, had thrown this key backward, carefully, but blindly aiming, toward the pit. And her aim had been good!

Where she had got the key did not matter. That Burke had it now was the important part. For this key, unless Burke was entirely wrong, would unlock the metal door set into the wall of the pit.

A prayer of thanksgiving burst from his lips. The key grated into the lock, turned with a smooth *click-clack!* and the door swung away!

Feverishly panting, triumphantly certain that the tide of events was flowing in to victory, Burke dragged himself down the dark, narrow corridor that presented itself.

It was a short corridor, too, lined on either side with broad shelves and racks—and it ended in a door which this key would not unlock.

Burke paled to a ghastly shade. Wouldn't unlock! But it *had* to. Frantically, he rattled the key, but there was no traction. Jamie had tried to help him, and unknowingly had raised his hopes only to dash them. He was trapped and trapped with a vengeance. His throat erupted with bitter curses that died away and left him with an aching empty feeling of utter failure. He slumped limply against the unyielding door, immersed in a terrible despair.

After a long half hour, he at last moved, sluggishly. As sluggishly, his thoughts started to flow again. Curiosity had always been the driving force of his life, and though his conscious mind might seek death, that immutable character-force deep beneath the conscious, call it *esprit* if you will, bade him always fight, fight to the death.

His eyes were now on the dark shelves lining these walls. He saw the glint of metal. He reached up, and from a stack of similar weapons drew down—a sword!

His emotions remained on the same level, for they were exhausted. And anyway, this was the supreme irony. This narrow room was evidently an arsenal of some kind, and the shallow pit in which Dinakki had so cruelly imprisoned him, had merely been a supply booth, a quartermaster handing weapons up to lines of soliders. Burke laughed hollowly. Now he had a sword—and was powerless to use it.

He groaned and limply stretched out on the floor.

He slept. The swift succession of apparent victories which had as swiftly turned into defeat had drawn every erg of energy from both muscles and nerves. He knew he was done for, finished!

And while Burke Donlevy slept, his tortured mind was crawling with dreams. Dreams of bearded ancients, bending over him with a hypodermic; dreams of strange, painful gusts of strength shooting through his body, throbbing at several nerve endings; dreams of an impossible Burke Donlevy who drew himself agilely to his feet and stood alone . . . stood alone his own two legs! A reborn Burke Donlevy. And the dreams were strong, strong. . . .

Burke Donlevy had never sleepwalked in his life. He had scarcely ever had reason to dream. And he did not believe that dreams came true. . . .

Until his eyes opened, opened on real life, and he was standing erect, without support other than his own nether limbs.

CHAPTER XIV

STANDING! And with a sword clutched in his hand.

The fog of sleep cleared entirely from eyes and mind. His muscles bunched against the disillusionment that, certainly, must follow swiftly. He bit at his lip, ready for the dagger of disappointment that would plunge into his racked brain.

It did not come. Instead came belief, belief in an illustrious miracle. He sobbed aloud, remembering the substance of his dream, knowing at last that a medical science lost to the world that he knew had done that which had been deemed impossible. For more than two weeks, the serum had worked in his body, slowly, subtly, creating neurones, lacing them into patterns, into bridges across which the life-giving, the strength-giving energies had crossed. Torn nerves had rebuilt themselves—motor control was back!

Nor had it happened suddenly. He remembered those previous times when he felt little pluckings of sensation . . . and dismissed them as imagination.

He fell to his knees with a choked cry, bowed his head; and though he was not a religious man, he breathed out his gratitude in prayer.

Captain Burke Donlevy, retired, could walk again!

And could escape from the pit wherein Dinakki had imagined him to be so helplessly imprisoned. . . .

NEW life, new hope! Such was the joyous paean that sang in his heart as his powerful arms drew him over the edge of the pit, an edge he could now reach. His legs came up, levered him erect, and he stood proudly, swaying a little, scared a little. Then he moved off, down the broad corridor that presented itself, toward the square of light that showed in the distance.

His jaw was thrust out, the light of battle was in his eye, and his strong right hand was closed over the jewel-shot haft of the broadsword.

He was ready to do battle with Dinakki; he was ready to do battle with Lolarth itself.

"It's all right now, Jamie," he whispered. "You and I—we're going back—back to the twentieth century! And then I'll show those bigwig doctors whether or not Burke Donlevy is out of the war!"

His thoughts were running high when with infinite stealth he stole up on the blue-clad warrior who leaned carelessly against the door that led into a narrow alley behind the royal palace. And when the fellow swung around with a gasp of startlement, only to find the point of Burke's weapon nicking his chest:

"Disrobe!" commanded Burke.

He was chuckling silently to himself as he laced over the last button-strap of the frightened fellow's apparel. An awkward fit, but no matter. He now had a ray-gun, and it would be a convincing argument for those who might doubt his being a mere soldier.

A moment later, he was urging his way up a dank flight of stairs. Below him, stretched out in a dark corner, victim of a paralysing jiu-jitsu blow Burke had learned long years before, the guard lay dead to the world.

On the second level, he blasted a guard before he had time to draw his weapon. On the third level, a bored guard took him for what he pretended to be, and yawned him past.

On the fourth level—Burke stopped halfway up the stairs, his eyes dilating.

He was suddenly uneasy, oppressed, as one is before a hurricane. He stood there, striving to understand what chill premonition of catastrophe it was that could drive away this song of victory that surged within him.

The stairs shivered minutely beneath his feet.

As if a rumble from the very bowels of the earth had found its way to the surface, he heard a sound so deep as to be almost inaudible, tangible only to the sense of touch.

The short hairs on his neck stood up. The whole earth was shaking! The palace was shaking! What was causing it?

AND suddenly, there was no longer any need for stealth. The palace around him overflowed with the frightened roars of men, the terrified screams of women. From every room, from every culvert, then, came the nobles and ladies of the palace.

It was panic. Burke recognized it. He threw himself back against the wall as men and women threw themselves down the stairs, scrambling, weeping, hysterical with a mad fear.

Burke was chilled to the bone by their absolute disregard for anything, each other or their clothing. All they wanted to do was escape.

And escape from what?

"It has come!" An old harridan,

gathering her royal robes about her, shrilled the words above the pulsating rumble that now was so fierce that Burke found it difficult to stand erect. "They have come to destroy Lolarth at last! *Ahhh!*"

Her voice ended in a dying gurgle as she lost her footing, plunged down the stairs. The crowd tramped over her.

Burke was beginning to see some of the truth. It scalded his brain. And suddenly he was fighting his way upward through that madhouse, knocking about with the flat of his sword.

"Jamie!" he cried in panic. "Jamie! Where are you you?"

Where was she, indeed? When she had spoken to him, as she stood on the edge of the pit short hours before, she had intimated that her suite was on the tenth level. But in all this mad havoc she must have left. There were other staircases than this—

He hurled himself up flight after flight, a bitter fear in his heart.

Suddenly, he was alone on the stairs, and all sound had faded away below. All sound—except the tearful cry of—Jamie!

"I won't!" she gasped, wildly. There were sounds of a struggle. "Free me, free me! I want to die here, I want to die with Burke. No, no, I tell you—"

"You little fool!" Dinakki's knife-sharp voice cut the air. "So you were playing a game of make-believe!"

There was the sound of a pungent blow. Jamie spoke no more.

Burke, face set with grim fury, was at the head of the stairs as Dinakki came running down the corridor, carrying Jamie's limp body in his arms.

Burke walked toward him swiftly, his ray gun out.

Dinakki saw him, backed up toward the wall, still holding Jamie. He must have known Burke wouldn't fire while she was in his arms.

He stood at the wall, and too late Burke realized his purpose, a trick that wouldn't have fooled even a fourth-rate cop back in Burke's time. But so fantastically improbable was this civilization that it did not seem they would have anything so prosaic as light-switches on the walls. . . .

But they did. And the corridor was plunged into a blackness that not even the faint dribble of radiance from the stair-well could relieve.

Burke went forward, plunging. He must have caught hold of Dinakki's arm. He pulled the man toward him in a bear-hug, brought his fist back, his teet gritted in elation. He was going to enjoy this. He was going to—

Something crushed glancingly against his skull. His senses reeled, numbed; his muscles turned into wet, sodden ropes. He slumped on the floor and lost consciousness immediately.

HE LAY motionless for a second, wondering how long he had been out. Long enough to insure his own death, probably long enough to insure Dinakki's escape with Jamie.

He groaned, holding at his head. He staggered erect, and went stumbling toward the stairs in the palling darkness. He felt his way down by the bannister—a bannister that was shivering like a reed in a high wind.

A new sound had added itself to the terrifying thunder that seemed likely to split the world; a demoniac *animal* roar—or more correctly, reptilian roar. The roar of not one, not a hundred, *not a million*. . . . Burke's mind stopped there and would think no further.

The sound came from the east, rolling down the valley, and might be miles, or only a mile distant.

Burke knew the truth. No wonder the people had sought escape. *Dinosaurs!*

THE palace was empty, and Burke had no trouble gaining the city streets. It was there the trouble started.

The streets were rivers of human flesh, madly pushing westward. Burke stopped, appalled. How would he get through that crowd? He had only one consolation. It would take Dinakki twice as long with Jamie in his arms, or perhaps fighting him. His lips pursed with determination. He waded in.

And his goal stood out clearly against the sky. The pyramid! The pyramid on the top of which his bipedomobile still stood.

As he had suspected, none of these barbaric people had thought of touching the legged machine.

"All to the good," Burke thought, as he forced himself savagely through that mass of screaming human beings. "Their supernatural fear of the Kimber won't let them touch the machine. Maybe it'll be a good thing if these millions of people do die. They've gone to seed."

He found a cleared space, plunged across it. And all the while, a great pulse of triumph beat in his thoughts; I'm standing, I'm walking, I'm *running*. . . .

And yet, what good would this almost-forgotten blessing of legs do him if Dinakki gained the bipedomobile before Burke? For it seemed likely that Dinakki would head there, a sure, safe means of escape.

Nor was he wrong. On the farther fringe of the crowd he saw the dark-skinned betrayer, fighting his way through, walking sideways to facilitate his burdened progress. Jamie's head still drooped, her sun-golden hair flowing loose.

And as Burke watched, Dinakki reached the base of the pyramid, paused for a triumphant moment to stare upward at the serenely standing bipedomobile, and then, laboriously but quickly, began to negotiate the steps.

Burke snarled.

"Out of my way!" he howled at the impeding humans. He formed his hands into a wedge, and was guilty of a merciless selfishness. He cared nothing for what happened to these people. He felt no twinge of pity. And why should he?

They had died millions of years ago, and their city of Lolarth was less than dust!

HE REACHED the base of the pyramid too, with a dozen broken heads behind him, his sword in one hand, his ray-gun holstered snugly at his hip. He was dead tired, his leg muscles were like burning ropes, unused to the strain that had been put on them, and his breath scalded his throat.

He got halfway up the pyramid and fell to one knee. At the same time Dinakki was forced to rest within a few steps of the top.

He stood with his eyes turned to the east. Burke saw his shoulders shudder with a visible horror. Then Dinakki looked briefly down the slope of the pyramid, and for the first time saw Burke.

He cursed lividly, struggled up again and reached the level whereon stood the bipedomobile.

The door was closed, of course. He dropped Jamie without regard for her softness, and she rolled limply against one monster, metal foot. He jerked the curved steel door savagely open, stood a moment motionless; then, with a terrifying speed, he turned, stepped to the edge of the pyramid, drew his ray-gun, and fired pointblank at Burke!

The yellow beam held a round cylindrical hole in the air for a fractional second. There was a horrible burned smell as the beam clicked off. For a moment, Burke thought the beam had touched his flesh, but it had singed along the side of his body, doing an almost perfect job of searing his clothing away.

Before Dinakki could reactivate the deadly little weapon, Burke shot up the few remaining steps, all pains and discomforts forgotten in his desperate need to throttle Dinakki with his own bare hands. He caught Dinakki's ankle as the man stepped back. He jerked; Dinakki came down crashing, the ray-gun bouncing down the pyramid steps.

Burke was on him, fingers reaching for the man's throat, closing, squeezing. Dinakki's hands came frantically up, and Burke had to raise his head to escape those claws.

Raised his head—and saw horror!

For one moment that lasted for an eternity, he was looking eastward, over the rampaging city, beyond its walls, and into the narrow valley in which lay Lolarth.

Burke had heard tales of the buffalo that had roamed the great plains of his America. The herds, it was said, numbered in the millions, stretched for miles.

But here was a herd such as no James Fenimore Cooper could have dreamed of—a herd of dinosaurs!

A herd that hurled a world-shaking roar down the funnel of the valley; a herd that bulged in one solid mass against the flanks of the valley, that extended backward in distance as far as the eyes could see. And clear as the air was on that sunny day, Burke saw no end to that on-driving horde.

There were more than a billion horny reptiles plunging pell-mell toward Lolarth.

A billion dinosaurs in stampede!

For it must be stampede. Even in the one moment during which Burke saw them, the leaders of that senseless, fleshy horde vainly attempted to scale the walls of Lolarth. They hung on the walls, unable to lift their giant bodies over the obstacle.

But behind them, other dinosaurs climbed over these helpless ones, using them as ladders, crashing over the wall to form a causeway for the rest.

The floodtide of dinosaurs came gushing over the crumbling walls of Lolarth; and those which went down before insurmountable obstacle became crushed stepping-stones for their fellows.

And behind them the relentless pressure of a billion more!

THAT Burke saw in one long-drawn-out moment while Dinakki tried to claw at his throat. Burke emitted a cry of despair as Dinakki's knee caught him in the groin. He rolled over, doubled in agony—and Dinakki leaped on him.

Burke barely managed to get himself in hand as Dinakki raised his fist to pound at Burke's face. The hot breath of the arch-traitor mingled with Burk's own. His fiendish eyes seared. He screamed at Burke, screamed above the awful helpless noises made by the doomed inhabitants of the city, screamed above the earthquaking pummel of saurian bodies.

Burke giddily staved off the first and second blows, then came to grips with Dinakki. He kicked, scratched, gouged. He rolled on top, then was beneath again—and they were poised on the very edge of the pyramid, teetering.

They rolled over, crashed down a half-dozen steps. Their holds were loosened and both came to their feet. Burke cast one desperate glance at the sprawling blood-red buildings of Lolarth. His blood chilled. In one gray wave, millions of dinosaurs were sweeping into Lolarth.

Burke heard their monstrous bleats of terror.

He saw their weaving snake-like heads, their horned tails. Blindly they crashed into buildings, sending masonry flying. People screamed in awful despair as by the thousands they went under that incredible tide.

The front wave of dinosaurs was less than five hundred yards distant.

In another minute, they would engulf the pyramid!

And it was then that Dinakki stooped, picked up the ray-gun which had bounced down the steps short moments before.

"Now you die!" he cried vengefully, raising the weapon. "Scum who tried to thwart me! Your lifeless body, crushed and mangled by those brainless hordes who before this have overrun all the cities of our civilization, will lie for an eternity in the ruins of Lolarth. Civilization in this time is dead, and humanity will have to make the long struggle upward again, but they will have to wait until the giant reptile rulers of the Earth have died. And I?"

A malevolent delight crossed his face as he came one step nearer Burke, who stood rigid, helpless.

"And I, Dinakki, shall be somewhere in the future, with my bride, Jamie. Now *die!*"

BURKE was all set to hurl himself at Dinakki, into the path of the ravening ray that would shortly char his heart. Best to go down fighting. And then—deliverance, from an unexpected source!

A slim thing of metal, sparkling with jewels, lanced through the air. And even before it struck, Burke knew what it was. His broad-sword.

Dinakki could not evade it, though he tried. A great bellow of rage erupted from his throat as he swept the point aside. The blade landed crosswise on his chest, momentarily throwing him off balance.

And it was all that Burke Donlevy needed!

He roared with savage delight as he closed in on Dinakki. His fist, backed by his not inconsiderable weight, swept at a steep, pungent angle into Dinakki's chin.

Dinakki's head snapped back, he turned around like a stick, and then he tumbled lifelessly almost to the bottom of the pyramid.

For one precious moment, Burke savored his triumph. Dinakki did not move. Burke laughed joyously. It would be Dinakki, and not Burke, who would be trampled under the senseless feet of the oncoming horde.

He turned then, his heart beating swift steady strokes. And Jamie stood on the edge of the pyramid, the wind blowing out her golden hair. Her face was convulsed with terror.

"Run! *Hurry!*"

And, indeed, there was the utmost need to run, to hurry. Burke was chilled to the bone as he reached Jamie, thrust her madly toward the open door of the bipedomobile. Everything depended on short seconds now. For at this very moment, the first of the stampeding reptiles came thundering toward the pyramid, its tiny eyes red and bloodshot as it squealed at the top of its lungs.

"In!" Burke shouted. "For God's sake, get inside!"

He never bothered to close the door. He jammed Jamie into a corner, seated himself, and threw power into the time-machinery. The ***temporum*** tubes, for such he had called them, lighted slowly—and then flickered!

That scared him, until he remembered the machinery was operating on direct current. The tubes burned steadily again.

In a flurry of dreadful panic, he rotated the dial until the pointer was on that Lolarthian character which signified zero. He grinned tightly—and flipped the tab!

Lolarth blanked out on the instant, as a giant hand reached from an unnameable, unthinkable dimension, seeming to grab with cruel, lacerating fingers at the two time voyagers, willfully torturing every cell of their agonized bodies as they were drawn back to their own time.

But in that moment before his consciousness was snatched away, Burke caught one, all-encompassing view of doomed, prehistoric Lolarth. Half of Lolarth, its age-old structures, its decadent peoples was buried under a heaving sea of trampling dinosaurs; and off in the distance, the destroying, stampeding beasts came on endlessly to engulf the other half.

Civilization in that era was doomed. No city ever could stand before the unutterable might of those migrating, stampeding hordes. The giant reptiles had administered the *coup d'etat* which proved their rulership of Earth; and not until many millions of years from now would man regain his place in the sun.

Until that day when the giant reptiles died away, the scatterings of humanity would remain on a level scarcely above that of the beast.

CHAPTER XVI

BURKE reeled out of it, sick to death; and his first thought was for Jamie. He reached down, drew her erect, cradled her in his arms. She shook her head groggily and her eyes snapped open. Her glorious smile of utter relief came quickly.

"We're safe!"

"But if it hadn't been for you, we wouldn't be. Thanks for throwing the sword."

"Oh, Burke!" Suddenly her arms were around him, and she was shaking. "That beautiful, beautiful city—and Niggle!" The name came out in a wail of pain. "Niggle is dead, just like everybody else back there."

Burke remembered that Jamie had spoken of Niggle in her time-letter. He frowned.

Tears sparkled on the edge of her lashes. She didn't answer his obvious questions immediately. Her eyes focussed on the drear, windswept heath visible through jagged holes in the shattered plexiglass cupola of the time-machine.

"Where are we?"

His expression was vague. In the distance was a ruined castle. The countryside looked familiar.

"Don't know exactly. We could get out and explore."

"We're in our correct time, though, aren't we? That's the important thing."

He assured her they were. But they were both too utterly exhausted to move. Jamie's eyes were sad.

"Poor Niggle," she whispered. "She was my slave, Burke. Would you like to hear what happened to me, Burke? There isn't much to tell. I was sleeping in your house—in our house—the house we were going to share when we married. I awoke and I saw a man standing next to a cubical machine. He was perfectly visible in the light the machine threw off. And he was the same man I saw in the restaurant. That I talked about in my letter?"

He nodded. "I remember."

"I screamed. He squirted something in my face. I—slept. When I awoke, Niggle was bending over me and smiling. I will never forget Niggle."

She bowed her head. "Niggle taught me enough of the language so that I could talk with her. After we knew each other very well, she told me she was a Kimber—"

"A Kimber!"

"Yes," she answered. "There are—were—many Kimber in Lolarth. They were there secretly, though. The Kimber felt themselves responsible for humanity. They felt that humanity was decadent, that it might be the fault of the Kimber for supplying them with science and scientific instruments which humanity misused.

"Anyway, it was Niggle who smuggled the time-box to me. She had engraved your name on it somehow. Somehow, too, she got your characteristic vibration from my engagement ring and she impressed it in the machinery of the time-box and then when the time-box reached you all you had to do was hold it awhile and it would fly open."

HE ENCLOSED her small cold hand tenderly. "Who was it interrupted you, just as you finished the letter?"

"Jern Teer-mas." She bit her lip. "He was so—evil. He came to see how well I was getting on with the language. He told me that as soon as I became acquainted with my duties, the language and customs and everything, he would marry me, and I would be queen of Lolarth. I hated him. And I was glad the time-box was on its way. But I—I didn't have time to put down the whole string of symbols for the time-dial—but Niggle told me to close the box and send it and it didn't make much diff—"

Burke laughed. "It didn't, I suppose. Those last symbols were only decimal numbers anyway, and I missed Lolarth by only a few hundred miles. I would have found it eventually. No matter."

She finished. "The rest you know. Dinakki must have sent guards to my suite. They took me through a tunnel, and I stopped in front of some draperies and then I heard Dinakki's voice commanding the guards to bring me into the room—and there you were! Later on—later on I made up to Dinakki and I went with him when they carried you through two doors into that terrible pit. And I stole the key that unlocked the two doors from Dinakki's belt."

Burke made a wry face. "But it only opened one door."

"Oh, Burke!"

"But," Burke said grimly, "if it hadn't been for the broadsword I found there and which you threw at Dinakki later on and—you get it."

She did. Had it not been for that sword, it would have been Burke and not Dinakki who died under pummeling saurian feet.

Burke drew a deep breath. His pulses thrummed, as he looked out over the countryside. Familiar land, that—and now he placed it!

"All's well, Jamie," he murmured. "Because—" his voice lifted "—if I'm not mistaken, we've landed in—England!"

"England!" The proud name burst from her lips like a song. "Oh, Burke, you're sure?"

"What else? This foggy land is English heath. And look at that ruined castle, and the blue of the sky over there where it reflects the Channel. This is England. It can't be France—because I know France!"

Yes, he thought grimly, *I know France. I wonder if they've really opened a second front? I wonder if they're giving the Huns a little Hell?*

HE HELPED Jamie from the bi-pedomobile. They stood beside it, beside the great scarred bulk of that machine which had served them so well; and the moist cool air of beloved England blew in their faces. And they were thinking of the past.

The Kimber must be dead, Burke thought. All that knowledge. That science. Because even the Kimber, in their secret citadel deep in these prehistoric marshlands, could not turn aside those seething rivers of saurian flesh which at periodic intervals must sweep for hundreds of destructive miles across that dawn world.

The Kimber, and all they knew, had been trampled into the muck, because that age was the Age of the Giant Reptile.

Burke finally smiled down at Jamie, drew her close into the shelter of his powerful arms. He buried his lips in her soft yellow hair, and then held her yielding body with a tender kiss.

I wonder if they're giving the Huns a little bit of Hell? he thought. *Because if they aren't, I'm going to. Herr Schickelgruber, I've come back from Lolarth with a death-ray. We'll find out how it works, and we'll make more . . . and more . . .*

He felt the pressure of the ray-gun at his hip.

Jamie raised her head. A frown was imprisoned between her eyes. "Burke—" she said. "Burke, I just happened to think—did you—love Brisil—*too?*"

The thought had not occurred to him. But suddenly he knew the answer: *Yes!*

And he knew why.

Brisil had died childless, but Jamie was the reincarnation of Brisil. The seed had been carried down by a brother, or even a cousin of Brisil. And when Jamie had been born, Brisil, in more respects than the purely physical one, had been born over again.

He scanned Jamie's flawless features, and he knew that he might be in the past with Brisil, talking with her, looking into her hazel eyes. It was as if Brisil had never died. . . .

He gripped Jamie's shoulders.

"Yes," he said huskily. "I loved her—love her—as I love you. Jamie, Brisil still lives—in you."

She touched his cheek, her glorious eyes tender with her understanding, proud of the fulness of being that was hers; for she was the two sweethearts whom he loved, and no woman in all history ever gave as much to her man.

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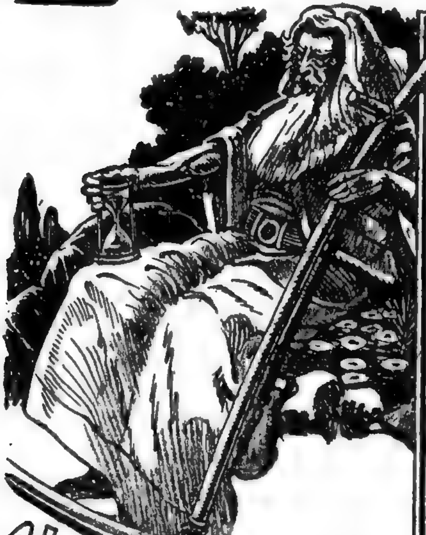
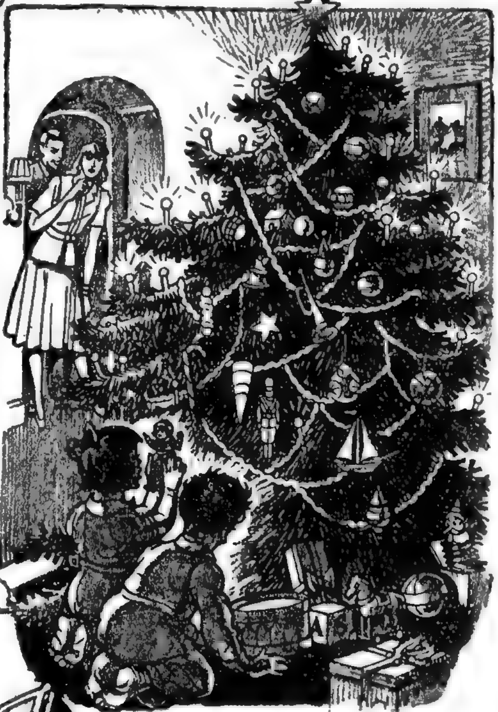
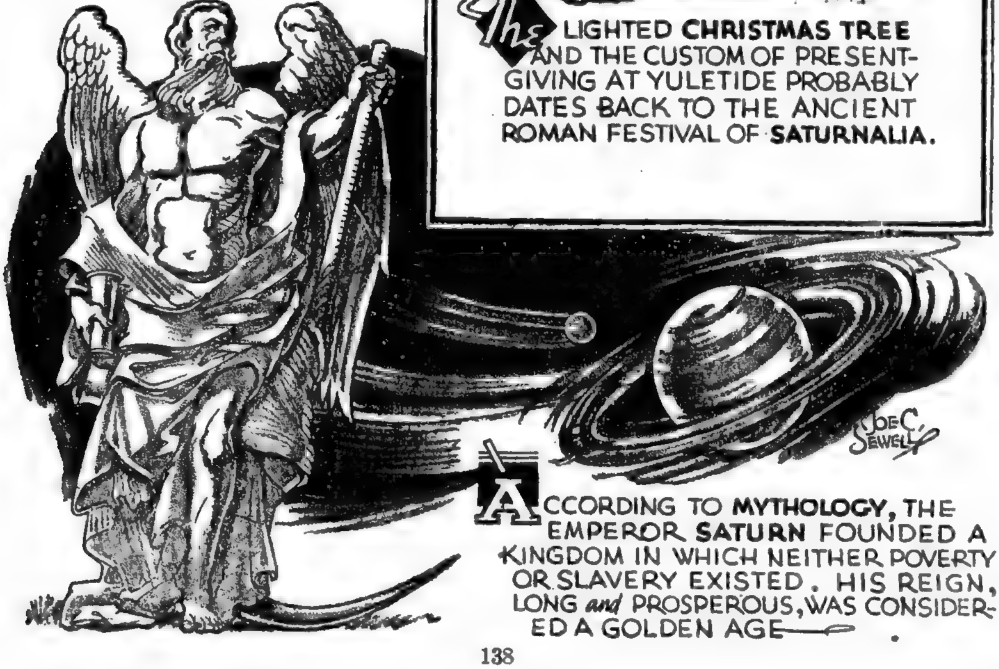


UNDOUBTABLY THE ANCIENT GREEK CHARACTER **CHRONOS** (*Father Time*) IS THE SAME AS THE GOD, **SATURN**, WHOM THE ROMANS OCCASIONALLY PORTRAYED CARRYING A **SICKLE** AS THE GOD OF HARVEST .



THE LIGHTED **CHRISTMAS TREE** AND THE CUSTOM OF PRESENT-GIVING AT YULETIDE PROBABLY DATES BACK TO THE ANCIENT ROMAN FESTIVAL OF **SATURNALIA.**



ACCORDING TO **MYTHOLOGY,** THE EMPEROR **SATURN** FOUNDED A KINGDOM IN WHICH NEITHER POVERTY OR SLAVERY EXISTED . HIS REIGN, LONG *and* PROSPEROUS, WAS CONSIDERED A GOLDEN AGE .

Mysteries

WHAT DO WE CELEBRATE AT CHRISTMAS?

By L. TAYLOR HANSEN

Most of us don't know the real origin of the "festival" of Christmas. These archeological facts will amaze you.

HAVE you ever wondered how our curious mid-winter festival with its lighted trees and its presents to children came about? Perhaps you once heard that a German farmer returning home late at night and charmed with the picture that the stars made while shining through the pine trees of the forest he passed, decided to duplicate the sight for his children, and thus inaugurated the custom. I heard the story too, and it satisfied me until I began to study Latin.

If you too, have been a Latin student, then you will know that your teacher confided to you the real origin of the custom. It was the ancient festival of The Saturnalia dressed up in modern clothes. No doubt she described to you the week of crazy festivities, the lighted candles in the Temple of Saturn, the gifts to children, the immense charities of the season, and how the masters and slaves traded places at the tables, the latter wearing the togas while their masters served them food? And also no doubt, like the present writer, you were now completely satisfied, that the Christian religion had merely taken over a popular festival which conveniently came at the same time of the year.

However, as one continues to study the ancients, and especially the civilizations which thrived millenniums before the time of Rome, the festival of The Saturnalia returns to mind again and again with curious new interest.

Saturn, a mythical emperor, was driven out of his own kingdom by a revolution, and coming to Latium, founded a kingdom. His reign was a long one and very prosperous. In other words, it was looked upon as a sort of golden age. Poverty and slavery apparently did not exist. The lighted tapers were placed in the Temple of Saturn (by Roman times he had been defied), in the memory of the abolition of the practice of human sacrifice, a change which he had ordered.

Curiously enough, even the strange custom of keeping the image of Saturn swathed in woolen bandages, which were only taken off during this festival, and the peculiar little peaked caps which the slaves wore, signifying that during this week they were freemen, also begin to take on a new significance, while Greek legends, so distant that they are almost unconnected, throw an added light upon our problem.

FIRST we have the Greek legend that Chronos (Father Time), who was the first Oceanic Deity, was deprived of his kingdom by the more virile, younger and not so beneficent Zeus. This Chronos is undoubtedly Saturn for his Roman statues sometimes depicted him with a sickle, possibly because he was the god of the harvest.

In the second place we have the satyrs who were depicted as living in the woods, and having budding horns, a tail and hoofed feet. And in connection with these creatures, we have the word satire or satyrical which clearly means to make a satyr of someone or something. The plain inference here seems to be that the Greeks were making fun of a previous ritualistic animal-dance of some kind, probably as performed by the followers of Saturn. These people would have been the Pelasgians, Cretans, and other peoples occupying the Greek Isles before the arrival of the Aryan-speaking invaders of the second millennium before Christ. Thus the figure of Chronos or Saturn is seen to be legend of the early "Peoples of the Sea."

If our reasoning is correct thus far, and Saturn belongs to one of those interesting ante-diluvian civilizations, then we should be able to trace more completely to which ocean he belongs by searching the lore of the people who inhabit their shores.

Now curiously enough, the thunder and lightning deity of the Karibs of the Caribbean Sea was always kept wrapped in bandages to restrain the image from "making storms," while, it must be noted that in spite of the supposedly beneficent personality of the mythical Saturn, the word saturnine as applied to an individual means dark and stormy or gloomy and morose.

In both cases, the wrapping of the image in bandages meant restraining its power, and thus the bandages were linked to the death custom of swathing the mummy, perhaps originally to keep the spirit from roaming among the living on dark nights.

In connection with the bandages, it must be noted that many ancient peoples wrapped their arms and legs. This seemed to be a custom of the

Ancient Cretans and of other sea-powers living along the Atlantic coast. Some of the drawings of the old Gauls and the Norse suggest such leggings, though they must have been quickly adopted from tribe to tribe as a partial defense against arrows.

Among American tribes, we have the depiction of them in drawings of Ancient Chan-Chan on the west coast of South America. The custom is prevalent today in the Brazilian jungles among the lighter-skinned tribes, though it was anciently practiced by the Karibs and many other Central American Indians. Furthermore, should one go to the picturesque Hopi Pueblos of today, you will still see the Hopi maidens wear these wrappings which give the appearance of white boots, when seen at a distance.

AS for the lighting of candles, that is a very important part of both the modern Greek ceremony of Easter and the Spring Ceremony of the Incas. In both cases, all fires are extinguished, choruses chant ancient litanies back and forth and then the priest lights the first candle, while the people light theirs from that of the priest and then from one to the other. With the Incas this occurs at dawn, while the Greeks have shortened theirs until just after midnight. In both cases, the ceremony is clearly one of sun-worship and undoubtedly comes from a very distantly common source. It must be noted that these too, are grain ceremonies of death and renewal. Was The Saturnalia originally the same? Did it mourn the death of a beloved reformer? A man indelibly connected with grain?

And now the last curious circumstance, namely the freeing of slaves and the peaked hats whose point is tipped forward. In the very earliest pictures of the Gauls and Kelts we often note this cap. In the very earliest vase portraits of what we suppose are the first invasions from Europe into the Mediterranean, we note the caps. The Phrygians, an early Mediterranean peoples of probable European origin, made them famous. We are told that these people carried a name which is still significant for it is pronounced—"Free-gians." Curiously enough, every goddess depicting freedom wears this little cap. You will recognize it on your dimes.

Does the placing candles on trees really have a druidical significance? And why did both the Ancient Romans, and the modern Christians make such a great effort to bring happiness to the poor, the oppressed and to children upon this holiday? It is my belief that these were the former victims who had been offered up in sacrifice before the great-hearted reformer abolished the custom. As one studies ancient civilizations, one is impressed again and again that it is the people born to slavery, the prisoners of war, and the children of the nation who are the classes most subject to be the victims of human sacrifice.

Thus has been preserved to us one of the great festivals of the ancients. We do not know just what it all means. Much history before the dawn will have to be unraveled before we can understand where this kingdom of the sea was located from which Saturn, the world's first great reformer, was driven—probably by the enraged priesthood. Must we not suspect a great civil war in the legendary land of Atlantis which is supposed to have sunk below the waves of the ocean over which she once ruled?

Science has much work to do before the full story of the festival of The Saturnalia can be understood. Perhaps it shall never be explained, and must forever remain one of those half-told stories which floats like a misty mirage just beyond the dawn of history. Nevertheless, when we sing old songs in choral groups, place lights upon the Christmas tree, give generously to charity and make the day a happy one for the kiddies, we are doing things which once, long millenniums ago, had a far deeper meaning than they have in this twentieth century A.D. when we call the ancient Saturnalia by the modern name of "Christmas."

THE END

NEW USE FOR VITAMIN C

THE research of George Vngar, a Frenchman who has been forced to continue his work at Oxford University in England after the Nazis invaded France, has attracted the attention of medical science all over the world. The research involves the theory that vitamin C can save the lives of persons who have suffered a heavy blow. Thus far experiments have been confined to rats and guinea pigs but results have been consistently good and exactly the same in both cases.

First the test animals were hit with a blow that killed them and the force used was carefully measured. A blow with exactly the same force was then given to exactly the same type of animal and immediately after the blow a dose of vitamin C of 100 milligrams for each kilogram of the animal's weight was administered. Not one animal given the vitamin C died. Since rats are able to supply their body with vitamin C needs synthetically while guinea pigs cannot, both animals were chosen to serve as "test subjects" so that every possible angle could be studied.

The experiment with the rats shows that the normal amount of vitamin C found in the animal's body cannot give the protection to the blow, but that an extra dose of large quantities of vitamin C are necessary immediately after the blow to prevent death.

If the same results will hold true for humans, it may be used to save the lives of thousands of our soldiers who would otherwise die from the effects of sudden blows sustained in battles.—*Harvey Johnson.*

VIGNETTES OF FAMOUS SCIENTISTS

By ALEXANDER BLADE

Harvey

The man who opened a new field for medicine by his discovery of the circulation of the blood

WILLIAM HARVEY, English anatomist and physician, celebrated as the discoverer of the circulation in the blood, was born at Folkestone, England, on April 1, 1578. At the age of fourteen he was sent to Caius College, Cambridge. After five years' study at the university he traveled through France, Germany and Italy and then decided to enroll himself at the University of Padua.

Here while attending the lectures of Fabricius, the celebrated anatomist and surgeon, he learned of the existence of valves in the veins, the purpose of which at the time was not understood. However, he was greatly impressed.

He graduated in 1602 as doctor of medicine and entered upon the practice of the profession in London, rapidly attaining such eminence that in 1607 he was elected a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, and in 1616 to its chair of anatomy and surgery. He was appointed physician to James I in 1618 and was physician to Charles I from 1632 to 1646. He accompanied the King in the battle of Edgehill in 1642, and during this engagement the Prince and the Duke of York were intrusted to his care. In 1645 he was elected Warden of Merton College, Oxford.

In 1653 Harvey built a library and museum, which he presented to the members of the College of Physicians. He resigned his professorship of anatomy and surgery in 1653, at the age of 75, and died on June 3, 1657, of paralysis. He was buried at Hempstead Essex; in 1883 his remains were placed in the Harvey chapel.

Harvey made a specialty of the study of the veins, arteries and heart, and finally announced his great discovery of the circulation of the blood. Before his time it was of course well known that the blood was constantly in motion in the living animal, but, because the arteries were always found empty after death, it was supposed that they were a part of the respiratory system, and carried air only. Harvey's description of the course and circulation of the blood met with great opposition and the ridicule and unwarranted attacks resulted in a great diminution of his practice. In time, however, he had the satisfaction of seeing his doctrine accepted entire; but the labor and devotion of twenty-five years were requisite for the attainment of the final result. Six diagrams giving views of the circulatory system of the human body, life-size, with which Harvey illustrated his lectures, are still preserved in the museum of the Royal College of Physicians. In 1628 his work on the subject entitled "Exercitatio de Motu Cordis et Sanquinis in Animalibus" was published in Frankfort, Germany.

Harvey's investigations in physiology and anatomy included other subjects in which he made valuable contributions to knowledge, but none of these were fundamentally so important and far reaching as his great revelation of the mechanics of the body. In this the outstanding feature was the explanation of the operation of the valves in the veins which, being so constructed as to be capable of passing the blood in one direction only, compelled it to keep moving onward. Without them it would never get back to the heart which, in its turn pumped it into the lungs where it experienced the rejuvenation of oxygenation. It was this question that so powerfully attracted his attention during his school days, and invited his continued investigation until the problem was solved. It is true that in his day oxygen was unknown, as well as carbon dioxide, so that the actual chemical reaction that occurred in the lungs could not be understood, but even in his time there was a general concurrence among physicians that the act of breathing was one which in some way resulted in a purification of the vapors and liquids of the body, for at its cessation at death decomposition was observed at once to begin.

In one point only was Harvey's demonstration of the circulation incomplete. He did not see the capillary channels by which the blood passes from the arteries to the veins. This gap in the circulation was supplied thirty years later by the great anatomist Marcello Malpighi, who described the capillary circulation four years after Harvey's death. But the existence of the channels first seen by Malpighi was already clearly pointed to by Harvey's reasoning. Harvey's whole treatise on circulation, which occupies only 52 pages of print, is a model of accurate observation.

A complete edition of Harvey's works in Latin was published in 1766 by the College of Physicians of London, including his "Treatise on the Circulation," his "Exercitations" addressed to Riolan; his work on the "Generation of Animals," the "Account of the Dissection of Thomas Parr"; and "Nine Epistles of Harvey."

Juggernaut Jones,

"They're not gonna draft me! Nosir!" howled the Juggernaut, donning a uniform. So into the army he went; to try sales ability at the front!

"THIS," I said, "is ridiculous." I read part of the letter, addressed to Valentine Parker Jones, again:

"Greetings: You have been selected for induction into the armed forces of The Interplanetary Union. Please present yourself at—"

"Valentine!" snorted the man behind me. "So that's what the 'V' stands for. Doodness Dracious!"

The speaker was a gentleman named Smith—an undernourished, mercenary individual—whom I had encountered several times during my brilliant, howbeit unprofitable career as ace salesman for Uneek Fliers, Inc.

"What," I asked, "are you, a spaceship Captain, doing here?"

"Drafted—like you."

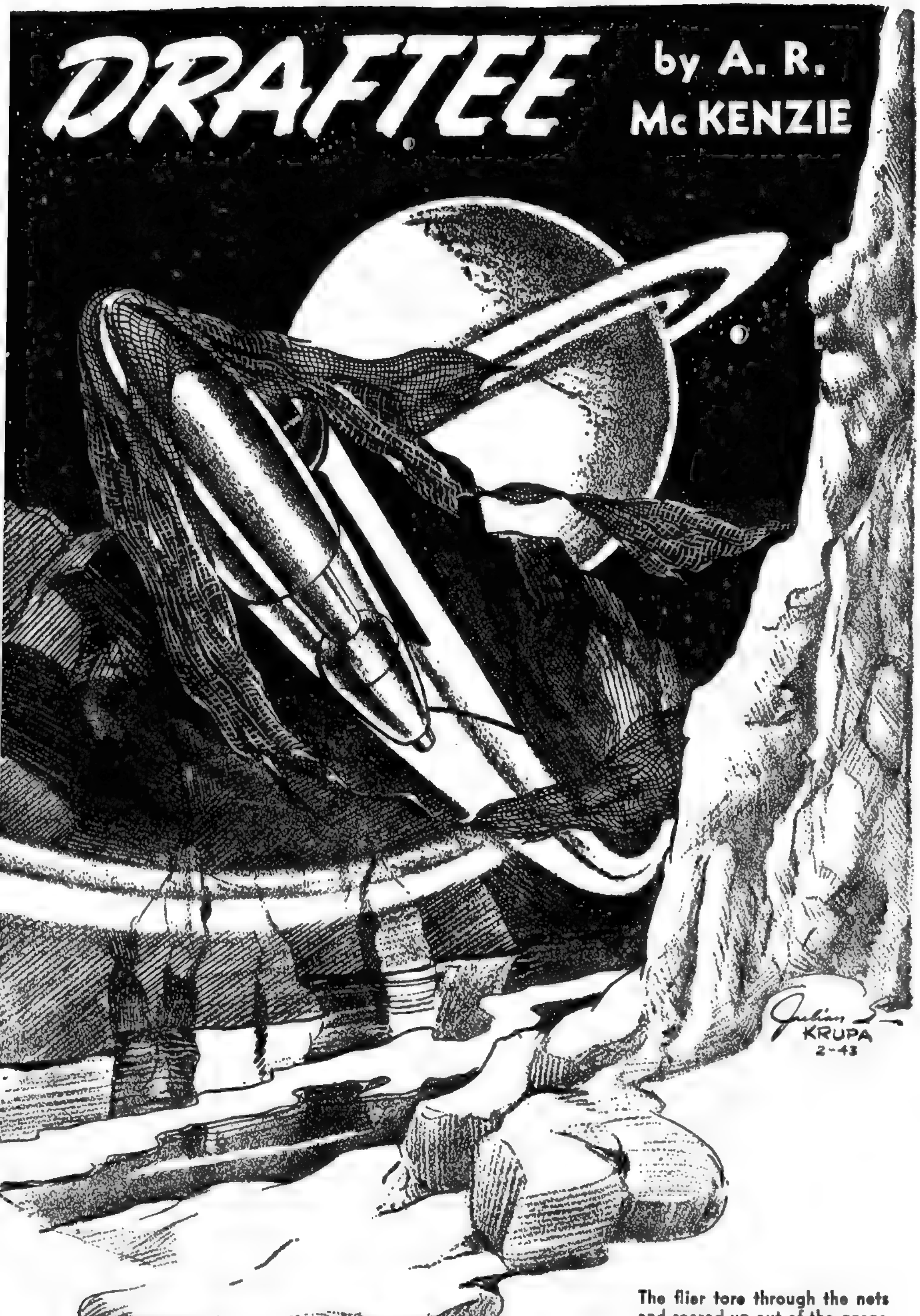
"But what happened to your freighter?"

"Asteroid Quakerton," Mr. Smith said grimly. "And Aveston, and the Piscites right here on Mars—and *you,* you baldheaded whale! That's what happened to my freighter!"

"Ah, yes," I smiled, remembering our voyages on the SPACEQUEEN. "On Quakerton, I engineered a most

DRAFTEE

by A. R. McKENZIE


Julian S. KRUPA
2-43

The flier tore through the nets
and roared up out of the gorge

amazing sales campaign. And on Asteroid Aveston, I astounded the system by not only selling airplanes to birds, but by outwitting my bitterest rival, unscrupulous Mr. Joe Karp who handles an inferior product, the repulser-ray Globe Glider—a product already being called the Flying Coffin due to its adaptation of a spaceship's sealed-cabin feature. A hideous contraption, sir, with no air-intake vents for either electro-motors or cabin thus threatening pilots with asphyxiation should the cheap aerating system fail. Now, a Uneek De Luxe—"

Smith closed one eye. "You're forgetting the Piscites."

"The inhabitants of Mars' northern Sea of Piscar? Never. For my skill in selling airplanes to fish, I was dispatched across the Void to Planet A-8, Altair System, where I sold my company's hypo-magnesium powered product to Metal Men who—"

"On Quakerton," Mr. Smith interrupted, "ack-ack guns damaged my freighter. En route Aveston, you blew out a portside rocket tube. Your cockeyed figuring sent it to the bottom of Piscar Sea where it rests now, forgotten in the present emergency."

"Emergency?" I asked.

Mr. Smith stared. "Gad, the blundering mute doesn't even know we're at war. The Black Fog! The mysterious raiders from Planet-X out by Pluto! The fathead doesn't even know—"

"I," I answered stiffly, "have just returned to Mars. I found this silly letter reposing upon my desk. I'm here to demand a retraction. A man of *my* importance being inducted! Ridiculous! I may accept an advisory position, but—"

"This," Mr. Smith said, "should be good!"

I drew a Planation Delight from my pocket and pressed the "on" button of my hypo-magnesium fueled cigar lighter. Despite the fact that the closed room was foul with the expelled breaths of many men—most of whom, judging from smells, were dock hands—the lighter burst into the same brilliant white flame so characteristic of Uneek's rocket-driven atmospheric planes.

An attendant, wearing a gaudy, winged trinket, tapped my arm.

"We would rather, sir," he said, "you didn't smoke."

"And I, sir," I said sternly, "would rather smoke. Away, peon, and fetch your superior. Zounds, but the time I'm wasting here—"

"Attention!" someone shouted.

ALL in the room leaped erect as a tall, thin, sharp-eyed individual, bearing fake-silver eagles upon each shoulder, made an entrance.

"Greetings," the newcomer said to all, "from the Air Corps." He paused. "I won't try to kid you—you're in for hell. But it's that, or the system dies! Any questions?"

I removed my cigar but Mr. Smith plastered his hand across my mouth.

"Don't," he whispered, "make it any worse for yourself."

"The facts," the speaker continued, "you know. The enemy, apparently, comes from Planet-X, Pluto's dark, unexplored neighbor. The same weird, black, carbonite fog, which has blanketed that strange sphere—and swallowed up our good-neighbor ships—is now attacking, in force, *all* the outer planets.

"Black specks appear in inaccessible crevices. The fog bursts forth, spreads rapidly. Explosives merely hasten the spreading. It hugs canyons, fissures. Atmospheric ships, seeking its mystic core, conk out on its fringes. Men, in space suits, enter—and vanish. What happens to them? Is the fog a living intelligence? Is it our enemy? Those questions, gentlemen, must be answered even before we can fight it. . . . We—you and I—are going to answer them."

Gasps swept the room.

"The fog is hedge-hopping, planet-by-planet, towards our sun. Mars is next. We must be ready. Those of you who pass today's physical will become the nucleus of a new flying outfit known as the 1st Atmos-Scout Group of the 110th I. U. Air Corps, Martian Area. I, Colonel Elburt Sturn, will be in command. Utilizing scores of tiny, fast, two-seater atmospheric planes, of a make still to be determined, we'll attempt to enter the narrow canyons and crevices, wherein this monstrosity breeds, and learn its secret. We will—or the system dies. . . . Raise your right hands."

Mr. Smith lifted his hand, freeing my mouth. I, however, remained silent. While the colonel mumbled a few words which the lackies around me repeated, I puffed meditatively upon my cigar. "Scores of tiny, fast, two-seater planes of an undetermined make." A market! . . . And Colonel Sturn was none other than Daredevil Sturn, champion atmospheric racing pilot! The perfect leader for this Group, and one who would outfit that Group with only the finest product available—the Uneek 30-jet, two-man Atmos-Bee racer.

Unfortunately, Sturn, due to engine failure in an earlier-model Uneek, had currently been racing nothing but the Glider Hawk—a flimsy, repulser-ray model which, even with its dangerous, sealed cabin, could not match Uneek's super-charger equipped Bee.

"I have," I said, "merely to explain how perfectly-blended gases, carried in lightweight cabin tanks, not only hypos the carburetor mixture in Mars' rarefied upper levels, but floods the cabin itself. I will demonstrate how a rocket-propelled, free-flying Uneek, powered by high-octaned magnesium, is able to negotiate either the highest mountains or the thickest fog with ease, whereas a Glider must, because it relies upon antiquated, ground-contacting repulser-rays for flight support and motivation, literally *feel* its way along, seeking always a near-level solid upon which to direct those driving—"

Quite suddenly, my cigar was lying on the floor. The attendant, who had struck it down, leered at me.

"You," he said softly, "are now a duly sworn member of the I. U. Air Corps. No smoking. Shuddup and git the hell in line!"

I MARCHED to another chamber where a number was painted upon my wrist.

"Time," I said calmly, "will correct this ghastly mistake."

Another sales campaign — choked with obstacles—was in the offing.

My objective was two-fold: (1) to sell Uneek 30-jet Atmos-Bees to the armed forces and, by doing so, to (2) save the Union from the Black Fog. Both projects were complicated in that (1) I was being shanghaied into the forces, sans authority, and (2) Colonel Sturn, whom I must first sell, favored a competitive machine.

"Strip to your shorts. Carry your wallet and—"

An attendant was, apparently, directing his remarks to me.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I said: strip, Fatty. Down to your shorts and—"

"This," I said hotly, "has gone too far. If you think that I, V. Parker Jones, will disrobe before these stevedores—"

Three muscular individuals leaped forward. In a trice, my virile howbeit large-boned physique was bared to the world.

The debacle began at 9:00 A.M. At 5:00 P.M., I, a quivering, broken, bruised remnant of my former self stood before an acid-eyed menial at a desk. He glanced at my papers, then at me—in horror.

"Who," he thundered, "is responsible for this outrage?"

Doctors, hordes of them, rushed through the doorway.

"What outrage, sir?"

"These ghastly reports. Gad, this man-mountain can't be—"

"But it *is*, sir. Here—we'll show you."

Once again, the fiends attacked my flesh with their torture instruments.

"It's true!" the deskman gasped finally. "This thing is over-weight but fit." He stared. "But to look at it—" He stiffened. "We'll pass it as an experiment. If we can make a flier out of it, by Gad, we can make one out of *anything!* . . . Dismissed!" he snapped at me. "You'll have thirty-six hours to arrange your affairs."

Once free, I dispatched a spacegram to my immediate superior—one Harmon T. Dee, Manager of Interplanetary Sales at Uneek Fliers' home office at New Chicago, Earth.

> *"Gigantic war order threatened. Authorities conspiring to induct me into service in menial rank. Obtain rescinding order from President immediately. Inform same that I may accept a commission in Ordnance Department of I. U. A. C. Will consider rank of Colonel assigned to Office For Aiding Construction, Test and Recommendation of Atmospheric Flier Equipment. . . . Rush Deluxe Uneek Atmos-Bee for demonstration purposes. Suggest you simplify control board due to thickheadedness of men being selected to operate product. . . V. Parker Jones."*

WITH that obstacle liquidated, I plunged into plans for surmounting article 2 of the complications assailing me (i.e.; sell Colonel Sturn on Uneeks despite his preference for coffin-cabin Gliders) which would, naturally, lead to the fulfillment of both phases of my original objective (i.e.: sell Uneek 30-jet Atmos-Bees to the I. U. A. C. thus saving the system from the Black Fog).

Harmon T.'s spaced reply was discomforting.

> *"Impossible to contact President. Deluxe Atmos-Bee, equipped with control board a child can operate, already at Arid Desert headquarters of 1st Atmos-Scout Group, awaiting regulation tests along with seven competitive products. No sales campaign necessary, especially a (deleted) one which you invariably devise . . . Uneek Fliers gleefully placing you on indefinite leave. Believe Air Corps discipline just what you need. Your flagrant disregard for company instructions and barbaric disrespect for your superiors (me) has been a constant source of annoyance. Perhaps, when peace is restored, you will have learned to obey orders in the spirit in which they are given . . . Meaning: cheerfully, you (deleted) lug! . . . Harmon T."*

ARID DESERT, headquarters for the Atmos-Scout Group, was a barren, red-sanded area, accessible only by plane due to rugged encircling mountain ranges, far off in Mars' sparsely settled Southern Hemisphere.

We—some eight hundred fellow selectees, including Mr. Smith and myself—disembarked, and struggled, in a ghastly heat, across the parade ground to the barracks, hangars, shops and storerooms wherein our gear was stored, equipment issued and bunks assigned.

Emerging from barracks, attired in a snug blue uniform devoid of ornamentation, I trudged up the company street toward the commissary. In every direction, across the desert, snow-capped mountain ranges glistened. These, I ignored, realizing that when the crisis came, as it must in every campaign. Uneek's 30-jet Bee, assuring perfect carburetion by augmenting the thin gases found in the upper levels with a rich mixture drawn from built-in tanks, would surmount the highest peak by many feet.

So, unfortunately, would Globe Glider's dangerous, non-vent Hawk, providing its pilot was schooled in the complex manipulations so necessary when the driving repulser-rays were in contact with a rugged terrain.

Down at the street's end, I glimpsed a domed building.

"A hangar," I said.

Through the doorway, I saw eight Atmos racers of different makes, and all but one—the lethal electro-ray Glider—sported combustion-type motors.

"The test ships," I decided.

Two competitive products still clung to the obsolete design of rigid wing-and-tail assemblies, which utilized propeller-drive combined with wing pressure as a medium for flight.

"A far cry," I said, "from those antiquated models to a Uneek which ejects folded wing and tail assemblies only to aid emergency landings."

Uneek's test model was resting beside Glider's Hawk. There, too, I perceived an exceedingly thin gentleman, wearing a uniform with twin silver bars on shoulder. It was Mr. Joe Karp, my unscrupulous rival, and he was talking to Colonel Sturn.

". . . you need, sir," Mr. Karp was saying, "a light, atmospheric plane, containing *all* the features of a giant spaceliner, including sealed motors and airtight cabin into which no lethal gas might be sucked to defranchise both motor and pilot. After a study of *all* products, including a noisy, complicated and open-vent job known as the Uneek Bee, I find the *only* machine suitable is the one we, ourselves, in civilian life, endorsed so highly. A Glider, sir—"

"Mr. Sturn," I interrupted pleasantly, "would you, with a sealed-cabin Glider, expose us—your brave men—to certain asphyxiation? Never. You want, naturally, a Uneek, equipped with super-charger—"

"That," Mr. Karp said, "is the danger, Colonel. All combustion-type fliers here gathered—Uneek included—draw air from exterior vents. When this air is the deadly carbon dioxide, motors and pilots will die. A Glider, sir, needs no unsightly vents—"

"Unsightly?" I smiled, winking at Colonel Sturn. "Look, sir, upon Uneek's matchless, flush-type—"

"You," the colonel said, "are the lug who sold me that damned Uneek racer six years ago which conked out and cost me a fifty-thousand dollar purse."

"That," I laughed, "can be easily explained."

Someone—Colonel Sturn, I believe—suddenly shouted, "Guard!"

THE guard arrived and, by request, I saluted both Messrs. Sturn and Karp profusely then retired to the guardhouse where I found, among others, ex-freighter Captain Smith.

"The dice," Mr. Smith explained, "were loaded."

"I, too," I said, "have been sabotaged. Mr. Karp—"

"*Captain* Karp, Fatty," Mr. Smith said. "He's attached to the Office for Aiding Construction, Test and Recommendation and he's here to run a competitive test of scout planes."

"He's wasting time," another prisoner growled. "The Black Fog's a dioxide of carbon. Only a sealed Glider could maneuver in that stuff. All those other combustion ships need oxygen—"

"A Uneek," I said, "carries a rich, combustion-aiding gas in built-in tanks and—"

"Sure. But your damn Uneek's got thirty jets firing. How long you think them half-pint tanks'll last on a straight drain. 'Sides, that hull's all loused up with air vents. A pilot couldn't live—"

"The pilot," I smiled, "could wear a space suit."

"When a space suit weighs more'n them mosquito ships? Hell, you'd never even leave the ground!"

"Juggy," Mr. Smith chuckled "You're licked this time!" he scowled. "Good thing Sturn's ordering the tests for tonight. The Black Fog's overdue on Mars. She's liable to pop out a crack anywhere, anytime."

From then, till I was led away to various duties, such as polishing garbage cans, I debated the situation.

Being no longer concerned with profits, I was surprised to discover my objective had not changed. As an I. U. Pilot, it was natural that I be concerned with the ship I was to fly. Further, due to the scope of the project facing me (i.e.: saving the Union), I must be supplied with the best product available which, others notwithstanding, was the Uneek 30-jet Atmos-Bee.

"I must," I decided, "again prove superiority of product."

Unsurmountable obstacles faced me. I was (1) a draftee, lacking authority to carry out my plan. I was, further (2) in custody, unable to forward my plan. (3) The gentlemen who would engineer the elimination tests, Messrs. Sturn et Karp, were prejudiced in favor of the product my plan must prove unfit. And finally (4) I had no plan.

Just as the sun was dipping behind the western mountains, and while I was engaged in collecting used cigarettes near the commissary, I perceived Captain Joe Karp approaching.

"He," I warned myself, "is now an officer."

Dropping my refuse bag, I threw my hand smartly upward in salute, forgetting that I had been about to deposit a fistful of sand and cigarette butts into my sack.

Darkness fell before Captain Karp cleared the sand from his eyes.

"You," he said, "will follow me."

With heads bent against cold Martian winds, rushing in from the east, we made our way to the hangar. Entering, Captain Karp switched on the faint black-out lights.

"You," he said, "are going to wash and polish each and every test ship while I debate bringing charges."

He climbed into the pseudo-silver hulled Glider and was soon snoring lustily.

"A good soldier," I told myself, "obeys orders blindly."

Utilizing flex-glass gloves and sponge from a workbench, I rubbed briskly at both Glider and Uneek hulls. The result was disappointing.

"Soap will be necessary," I sighed.

IN A STOREROOM, I discovered a keg of brown pasty material. I coated both ships completely, only to find the material thickening badly.

"This," I frowned, "is not soap. It

is met-glue, designed for temporary repairs to ships while in flight. Once used, only water will soften it."

No tap was in evidence. I did, however, find several partially filled bottles in the storeroom. My efforts, with gloves, sponge and liquid, to remove the glue from a spot beneath the Glider's hull, produced another discouraging discovery.

"This liquid," I said, "is not water but an acid."

I was smothering the smoking section with sand when Colonel Sturn, with Mr. Smith escorting, came through the doorway. Again, I brought my hand up to a snappy salute—again forgetting the fisted sand.

"Consider," the colonel said, after clearing his eyes, "yourself under arrest."

"Again?" I asked.

Captain Karp tumbled from the Glider, saluted—amateurishly, I noted—sniffed loudly and let out a squawk as he stared at the coated ships. Fortunately, the doctored spot beneath the Glider hull was not visible. Outside, the wind was approaching hurricane force.

"Under the circumstances—" Captain Karp suggested.

"—the tests will go on!" the colonel snapped. "If a ship cannot cope with glue and unfavorable weather, I will not even consider it." White-faced, Captain Karp entered his ship.

"The first test," the colonel said, following, "will be of speed, altitude and endurance. You, Captain, will rise to your ceiling, proceed at top speed to the mountains, hedge-hop ranges and peaks until such a time as you have encircled the camp." He reached to close the door, preparatory to consigning himself to death by asphyxiation should the Gilder's aerating apparatus fail . . . "Jones, open the hangar door."

I twisted the door mechanism and shoved energetically. The icy gale caught the portal, sail-fashion. Both door and myself landed some feet away. I rose just as the moon Phobos hurtled above the mountains to see the brown-coated Glider lift a meager five-hundred feet and suddenly go tumbling helter-skelter off to the west at a speed approximating that of the wind.

"If that," I said, "constitutes the Glider-Hawk's ceiling and top speed, my fears have been for naught."

Mr. Smith was vaulting into the cabin of Uneek's Atmos-Bee.

"A commendable idea," I said, leaping after him. "We will follow, surpass the Glider's puny ceiling, race past that shoddy product, out-maneuver it and prove to the prejudiced colonel—"

"Blockhead!" Mr. Smith said. "Those guys aren't testing. Something's gone wrong and the wind's blowing 'em straight at the mountains. How do you start this junk pile?"

"A Uneek," I said sternly, "is not junk. The apparent complexity of controls assures safety from misfortunes such as asphyxiation. For example: when cruising in upper regions, where air being sucked through cabin intake vents is too thin to maintain life, this control—or this one—floods the cabin with a rich, jasmine-scented mixture. This lever here—or perhaps this one—"

"My God, don't you even know your *own* control board!"

"Deluxe models," I confessed, "*are* confusing. But this lever positively—I think—injects that same rich mixture into the carburetion system, allowing—"

"Start it!" Mr. Smith howled. "They're almost out of sight."

I PRESSED the starter control. Both twenty-foot emergency wings snapped out, bowling over two neighboring ships. I tried again. The wings disappeared. Three sub-carriage jets, in a bank of six, went into low-speed flame, igniting the oil-soaked flooring and blasting us straight up. The hangar roof crumpled and we were promptly proceeding westward on the gale, leaving behind a hangar and six test models burning brightly so that the Colonel and Captain, after crashing, might locate camp.

"No one," Mr. Smith groaned, "could do such things but Juggernaut Jones. Level off, dammit."

"This control," I said, "accomplishes that."

The tail assembly shot out. We executed three tight inside loops before Mr. Smith, tossing me aside, was able, by luck born of terror, to collapse the tail and send us reeling on. I noted instantly Uneek's unparalleled sluggishness. All jets but the three ventral stabilizers were blanked-out. The air, too, was growing foul. None of the cabin's intake vents seemed in operation.

"Sabotage!" I cried. "Captain Karp has—"

"Where," Mr. Smith gasped, "is the valve releasing this damned 'rich mixture'?" When we found it—and were breathing jasmine-scented but stale tanked air, he said, "Every vent, both cabin and carburetor — except those feeding the three ventral rockets—is clogged. We can't land because of the wind and—ho, mama, the mountains!"

They loomed ahead, reaching a discouraging distance above our present—and apparently top—ceiling. I saw, too—head and somewhat below—Captain Karp's Hawk. Despite the momentum given that craft by the hurricane, we were overhauling it.

"We," I said, "have exceeded its ceiling. Our speed, too, is greater. We have merely to out-maneuver that scow, in the presence of Colonel Sturn, and—"

"If I," Mr. Smith interrupted, "had the time I'd wring your fat neck. Juggy, we're *both* out of control. *Both* ships have been sabotaged. *Both* are being blown smack against the mountains."

Glancing ahead, I made a lightning calculation.

"We," I said calmly, "will never clear those hills."

I peered through the bomb-sight. The Glider tossed, a scant fifty feet below. Through its vision-shield, I saw two moving figures.

"Those men," I frowned, "are not dead of asphyxiation."

"But we'll be—soon!" Mr. Smith remarked. "Half the carburetor vents on those three ventral motors are blocked, too. Which means, they're sucking the air out of these half-pint 'rich mixture' tanks at a heluva clip. And if we open the door at this speed—Juggy, we're in a jam!"

The mountains were hideously close. And high. Directly below, the rising slope was cut with deep narrow canyons through which snow-bridged rivers were hurtling. Karp's Glider was bouncing unmercifully as those weakish repulser-rays slithered in and out of sheer-walled gorges. Yet as we were swept on towards death, I noted the Glider begin lifting toward us.

"He is following the rising slope," I said. "His repulser-rays will, if carefully manipulated, maintain him always at a set distance from that slope. He will, howbeit awkwardly, surmount this range. We, however, being a free-flying product, must certainly crash. Three sabotaged stabilizing rockets will never hoist us—"

Our vessel lurched suddenly upward. Captain Karp had hurled dozens of his dorsal rays upward against our hull.

"An old, old stratagem," I said. "Captain Karp is planning to blast us from the skies. That," I added firmly, "shall not be."

I GRASPED the control which should have struck the remaining ventral jets into flame. Again, the tail assembly stabbed out. We looped. Mr. Smith catapulted backward, struck on his head and was quiet. I quickly rectified my error. Though Captain Karp continued to ray-blast me, I hung cannily just above him. Thus, as he rose, so did I—riding always those propelling rays. And we went up, seeming, perhaps, to a watcher, like two brown-specked flies, crawling up the side of a gigantic, canyon-cut snow mound.

I, naturally, topped the ridge first where the gale smashed me full force. The Uneek took a ghastly leap forward. And as my crippled ship, ripped from the supporting rays and far above its ceiling, went spinning ahead and down into a sheer-walled canyon which lay just beyond the ridge, Captain Karp's fiendish scheme was, at last, apparent.

"He," I said, as my harassed craft rocketed downward into a frightful darkness, "boosted me to this pinnacle, pretending to save my life—thus currying favor with Colonel Sturm — yet knowing that I would be blown on to an uncharted grave in an inaccessible—"

There was a series of sharp cracks. The ceiling plates began buckling ominously. My speed, at once, doubled. Fiendish Captain Karp was following, flinging every ventral ray he possessed upon me, to make sure I crashed with sufficient force to assure death. Thus, he would be forever free of a most formidable rival—free to thrust his inferior product upon the I. U. Air Corps and upon the Union, afterward, should, by some miracle, the Atmos-Scout Group—sans my product—be able to discover the secret of and defeat the Black Fog already rumored to be attacking Mars.

"This," I said, "approaches dangerously close to the crisis."

Mr. Smith revived, moaning.

"The light," he said. "It's gone. Phobos should be shining, even down here. But it's like the void. It's—my God, Juggy, we're in it! It's come to Mars. It's encamped at this canyon bottom. The mad mysterious thing we've got to solve before we can fight it. We're in it. And no man or ship—once reaching its heart—ever came out. It's the Black Fog of Planet-X!"

"This, then," I said, "*is* the crisis."

Aggravated by Captain Karp's repulser-rays, we were fairly hurtling downward. The ceiling plates were bent but were holding. I smiled as over the bark of the three ventral stabilizers, I heard the roar of a mighty river, rushing along through a snow-choked canyon floor somewhere below us.

"Two ships," I said proudly, "riding upon the power of three tiny stabilizing jets. To Uneek's proven ability to reach a higher ceiling and greater speed, even under duress, I have added the final laurel. Endurance. All that remains now is the freeing of this mighty craft —and Colonel Sturn who must decide —from the Fog."

"All!" Mr. Smith said, gasping in the fouling air. "Juggy, we're smothering."

"I," I smiled, reaching for the cabin door control, "can remedy that."

AN HYSTERICAL Mr. Smith crashed my hand aside. "Carbon!" he wheezed. "It's a hypoed dioxide." He gasped. "Those motors now are running entirely on the mixture they're getting through the outer vents. But combustion engines conk out—"

"Magnesium," I said, "will burn in carbon dioxide—a fact I proved with my cigar lighter in the Armory's overcrowded reception room."

"But us—this cabin with its intake vents . . . The glue!" Mr. Smith screamed. "You sealed *all* the vents, and most of your rocket jets—and even Karp's repulser-ray slits — with met-glue!" The thunder of the river beneath us grew louder. "Water," he said hollowly. "Water melts met-glue. We'll land in that river. Sturn and Karp may get out after those repulser-ray openings are cleared because their cabin is *always* air-tight. But in this sievy Uneek, if we don't drown, the dioxide'll get us . . . This," he ended grimly, "is one spot, Juggernaut Jones, you'll never blunder out of!"

The nose of our stricken air-cutter crashed against an outcropping of the narrowed canyon walls. The tail dropped sickeningly. I felt the Glider's rays slither from us as we stopped suddenly, nose stabbing skyward. Hurled backward, I landed upon Mr. Smith. Again, he was quiet.

All was blackness. Not even the rocket glow could be seen, yet over the river roar—horribly close now—those stabilizing motors could be heard coughing gamely on. Abruptly, the Uneek took a woozy two-foot drop, hesitated, then dropped some more.

"The snow," I decided. "We've plunged into the snow-packed canyon bottom. The river has cut a channel beneath its blanket—a blanket through which the ventral rockets are now eating. If we go—"

There was a weird scraping noise. Dozens of rope-like objects slapped across the vision-shield and tightened.

"Cowboys," I said, "who rope all who come in range. That, then, is the secret. My mission is complete."

I had proven superiority of product. Colonel Sturn trapped with Captain Karp nearby, had been witness. Upon his recommendation, Uneek Fliers would be commissioned to turn out scores of sturdy Atmos-Bees which would annihilate the dastardly cowboys, thus saving the Union. In peacetime, my company, and self, strengthened by the prestige this victory would certainly bring, would skyrocket to undreamed of heights—and sales, plus commissions.

There was one minor flaw. I—and the necessary colonel—were trapped within sabotaged ships in an inaccessible canyon beneath an inky, lethal fog behind which lurked fiendish unseen cowboys.

I was, further, rapidly smothering.

"And, too," I frowned as my craft took still another stern-first dip through the melting snow towards the roaring river and death, "even should I escape, what of these cowboys? What are they? Where are they? How are we to fight them? Zounds, my mission is *not* complete."

My agile brain leaped into high-speed. Tense with resolve—and lack of breath—I grasped the cabin door control.

"I go forth," I said firmly, "to capture an enemy and wrest his knavish secret from him. I will, too, free Colonel Sturn and—"

Instead of the door, both wings and tail assemblies snapped outward. There was a loud, ominous crunch. At the same instant, the entire bank of my vessel's heretofore inoperative but potent posterior drive-jets burst into livid fire.

"Melted snow," I said, "pooling down around the stern, has, in turn, melted the met-glue from those rocket tubes."

EVEN as I felt the snow-roof over the river give way beneath the terrific heat-blasts, my ship catapulted forward and up, utilizing an ancient aeronautic thesis of wing pressure upon a medium, now one-half heavier than air, plus a non-synchronized propelling power. And as I, myself, catapulted backward and down, again upon Mr. Smith, I glimpsed Captain Karp's Glider, bottom-up where, unfortunately, my wing tip had knocked it—and with the spot I had attempted to clean plainly visible in the light of my giant, magnesium-powered rear rockets — tumbling through the crumpling snow roof into the churning river just below.

I saw the doomed Glider, buried in ropes but with no cowboys in sight, land with a monstrous splash, grind upon hidden rocks and then sweep on over a falls and down into a whirlpool already black-speckled with carbon produced by magnesium burning in the dioxide.

"And there," I said sadly, "goes Colonel Sturn in whose lost hands rested the decision as to which of eight competitive products would be best suited for his Group. Colonel Sturn, now, will make no decision in my favor. Even," I added, recalling the glue-fiasco, the burning hangar and six test ships, and gazing thoughtfully out at the bent wing tip as the incomparable Uneek Bee—wing-supported and under full rear drive—tore free of the ropes and went spiraling up to safety, "if that prejudiced gentleman *might* miraculously survive this debacle—unless, of course, I have been able to discover the identity, and vulnerability, of the Black Fog invaders, which, apparently, I have not."

THE message which, the next day after being apprehended some distance from Arid Desert, I spaced to Harmon T. Dee—once my superior—was, I believe, diverting. It read:

"Important Major of Air Corps Ordnance Dept. (OACTRAFE) en route New Chicago to supervise constructional changes (i.e.: simplified control board and sealing of air-intake vents) in Uneek 30-jet Atmos-Bee Scouting Plane, prior to its induction into Corps . . . Black Fog's secret known due to my stratagem of inducing a photographic plate upon Glider's hull (via action, beyond your understanding, of nitric acid upon glue-coated silver hull to form gelatinized nitrate, plus addition of a bromidic halide —I think) . . . Actinic-rayed magnesium blasts (akin to flashlight powders) caused impression of photographic picture upon hull. Study of picture, fixed by crude reducing solution of river, carbon residue and adjacent minerals, reveals rope-like articles to be living vines, growing from space-blown spores lodged in rock cracks . . . Dioxide-breathing vegetation to be destroyed with oxygen guns mounted on Uneek Bees—the only combustion-type flier able both to free-fly over battle area and to operate within lethal cloud (providing constructional revisions are followed) . . . Important: *War Dept. demands you accord Major of OACTRAFE full cooperation and advises, under penalty, you obey all orders in spirit with which they will be given . . . Meaning:* determinedly!

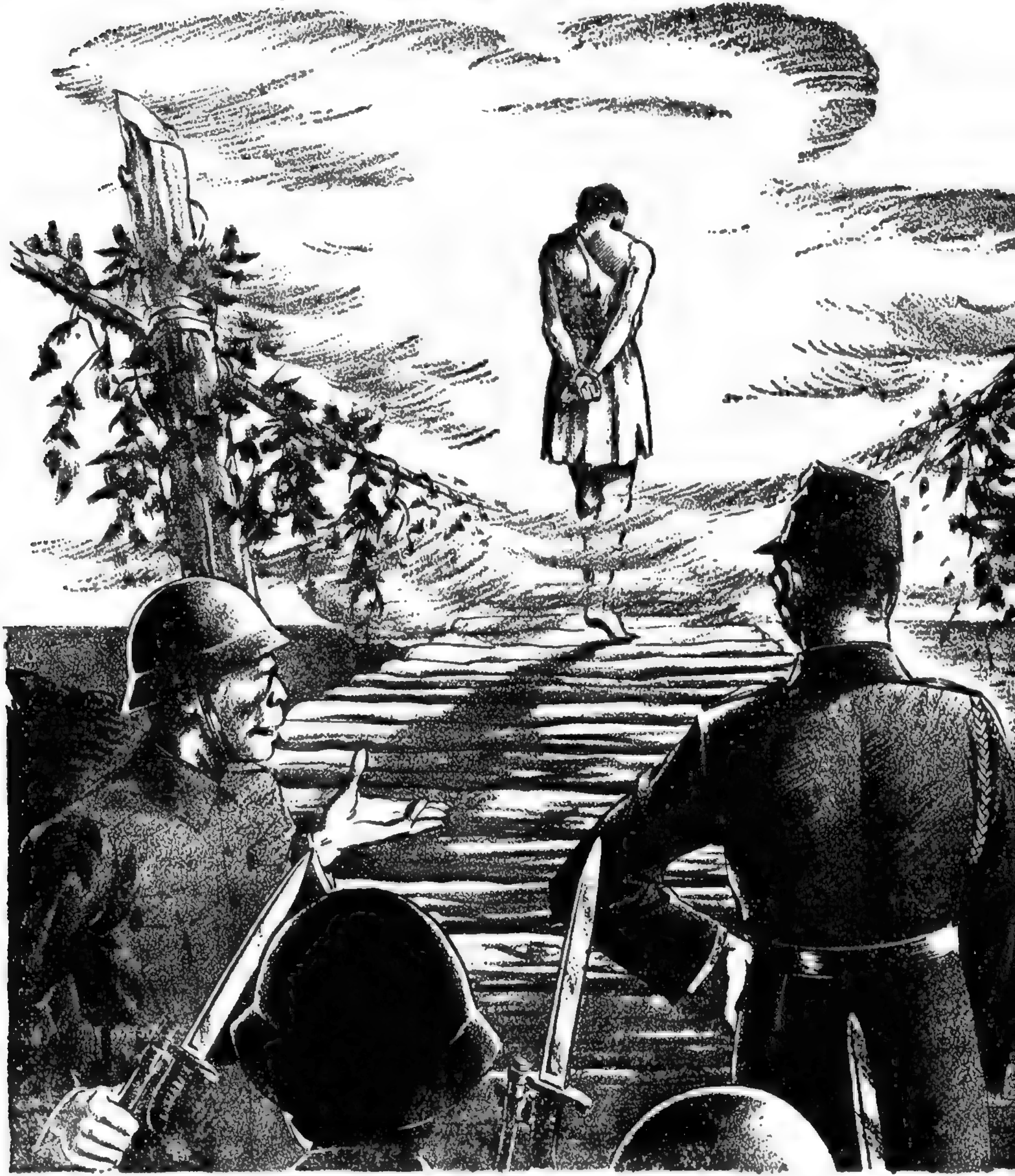
Major V. Parker Jones,
(OACTRAFE)
I.U.A.C., Ordnance Dept.
Entire Planetary Area."

THE END

Coming Next Month
"THE EARTH STEALERS"
A fine interplanetary novel by Don Wilcox

BRIDGE OF BANISHMENT

by LEROY YERYA



A strange mist swirled about the knees of Aben Dagh

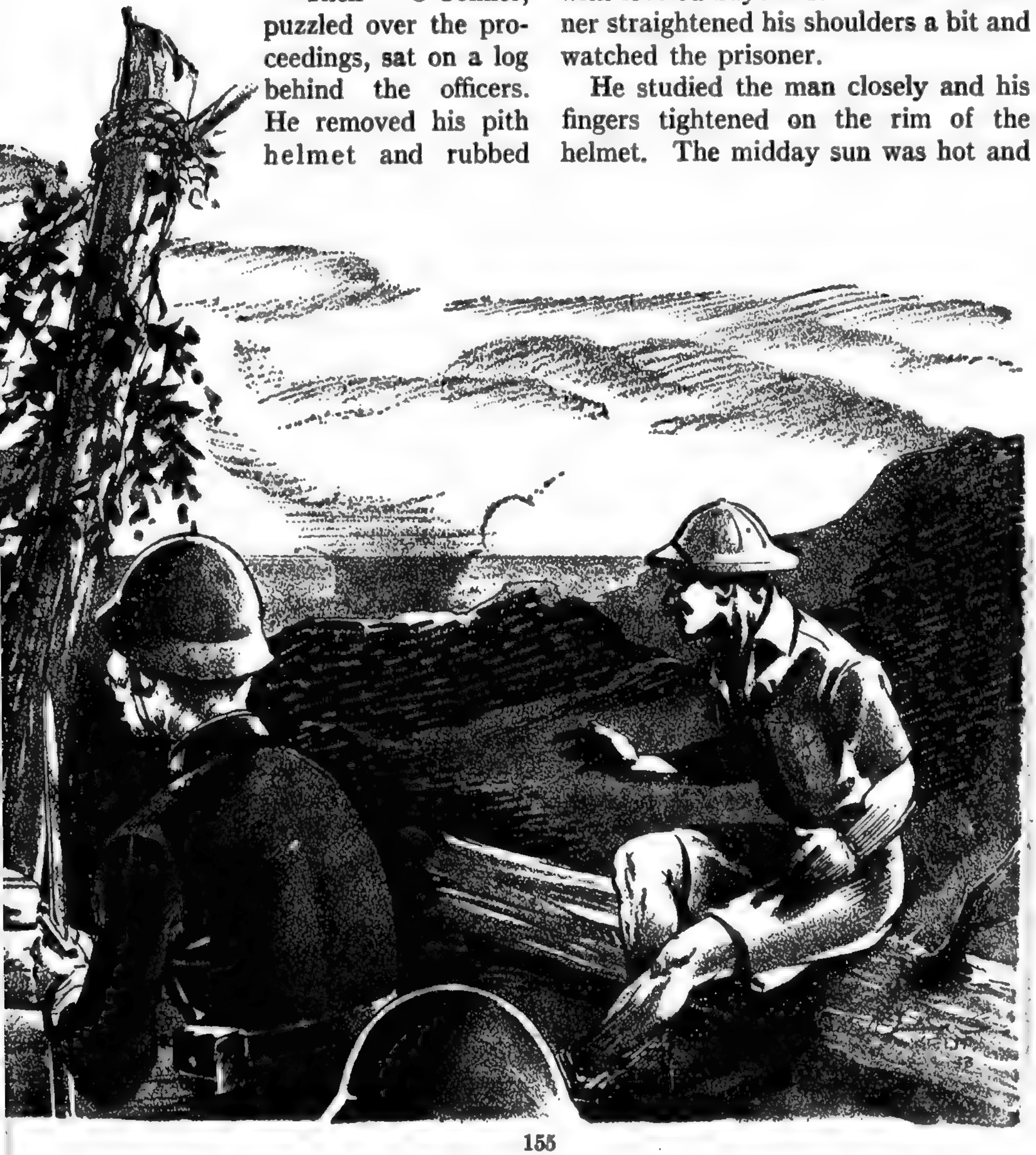
No one knew what happened to those who walked the bridge. The Japs used it for executions!

IT WAS a curious, overwrought group that gathered at the end of the footbridge. Three Japanese army officers stood in close conference. A half-dozen Chinese civilians had withdrawn to the safety of the jungle that grew close to the trail.

"Rick" O'Conner, puzzled over the proceedings, sat on a log behind the officers. He removed his pith helmet and rubbed lean fingers through a mop of damp, red hair. He had come alone down the trail from the Red Cross hospital to see this.

A figure clad only in a worn gunny sack tied at the waist, swung down the trail. Behind him came two soldiers with leveled bayonets. "Rick" O'Conner straightened his shoulders a bit and watched the prisoner.

He studied the man closely and his fingers tightened on the rim of the helmet. The midday sun was hot and



the jungle sent up a steaming, putrid odor of rotting vegetation.

The prisoner was a tall, bronzed Burmese. The inscrutable face and high head told O'Conner at once that here was a strong man. He approached the bridge and looked straight ahead toward the opposite bank. Below, the river foamed and roared between the cliffs of the gorge.

The officers were ill at ease. One of them looked apprehensively at the others and stepped forward. He spoke half-heartedly, as though to make a last gesture of authority. His words were English, harsh and badly garbled.

"Aben Dagh, you are prepared to face the punishment your crime demands?"

Aben Dagh said nothing, but his head dipped forward slightly in acknowledgement.

"Then—march."

"Rick" O'Conner came to his feet automatically. This was fantastic. Here was a Burmese condemned to walk a bridge for murder. The whole thing must be some sort of hoax.

He stared across the chasm. The footbridge swayed slightly in the wind. It was constructed entirely of jungle vines and the bark of trees. Green creepers had grown its length, strengthening the bridge for God knew how many years. They hung downward, waving like green snakes over the canyon.

His eyes returned to Aben Dagh. Grasping the vines firmly, the condemned man stepped onto the swaying span. His head bent, he hesitated, then walked swiftly toward the opposite bank.

A quarter of the way across, he stopped, glanced back. No sound disturbed the day but the steady rumble of the river below. O'Conner couldn't take his eyes away from the figure.

For a second, Aben Dagh's eyes caught his. Then, facing the opposite side of the gorge he went forward at a slow pace. The bridge swayed back and forth under his tread. In the exact center of the span, the man seemed to lose his balance. No cry escaped his lips as he fell forward on one knee. Faltering, he grasped wildly for the vines and pitched forward on his face.

One moment the Burmese was there in plain sight, trying to grab something solid. The next he was gone. Faded as surely as a dream fades with the coming of the day.

DAUNA WELLS, slim and white in the uniform of the American Red Cross, stood with blazing eyes before the short, burly figure of General Timosha. Though surrounded by enemies in a hostile section, she was more angry than afraid. Behind her, the rugged block walls of the Yunan Hospital towered against the sandy hills.

"I've asked you to stay away from the hospital," she said. "When you took over this sector there were only five of us Americans here. We promised to treat your men as well as the Chinese if you would leave us alone." Her lips tightened. *"That meant all of us. Personally, I hate you like the animal you are. I'd rather die than have you break one word of that promise."*

General Timosha was a small man but a smart one. He knew that from this woman he must accept insults, at least for the present. The Japanese High Command had sent him here with three thousand men and no medical equipment, to occupy the town. That they remained in good health was pertinent. Until these *pig* Americans had served their purpose, he must comply with their treaty. After that?

Timosha shrugged his shoulders.

"I respect your words." His dark angry little face, slightly squinted narrow eyes gave away his true thoughts. "But—I urge you to be more friendly."

A shudder passed through Dauna Wells' body and she turned her back on the diminutive Jap.

"For the time being, I prefer the company of my own kind," she answered coldly. "Please don't trouble me again or . . ."

Timosha's expression was not one of pleasure.

". . . or—what?"

Wordlessly, Dauna opened the screen door that led to the small hallway and went in. The screen slammed behind her. Timosha wheeled angrily and walked down the dusty street.

DOCTOR WALTER NOSHAN rolled down his white sleeves and removed the short surgical apron. He met his superior, Doctor Marshall Wells, as the older man came from the washroom.

"That one will never pull through," he said with a shudder, drawing a tweed coat over his white shirt. "Too much dirt in the wound."

Wells nodded his gray head slowly. Marshall Wells was perhaps fifty, tall (in contrast to the short, swarthy-skinned Noshan) and sparsely built. His jaw reminded one of solid granite and deep blue eyes were youthful in spite of the pain they had seen.

"Noshan," he said suddenly, still fumbling with his surgical cloak. "How long can we hold out here?"

"As long as our drugs and nerves hold out," Noshan said quickly. "The Japs won't touch the hospital as long as their own health depends on us. Later —God knows." He shrugged.

Wells sat down on the edge of a wicker chair and picking up a fan, rotated it slowly before his face.

"As we were cutting into that poor chap today," he said, "I thought how easy it would be to let the knife slip a fraction of an inch."

Noshan said nothing.

"Without us," Wells went on, "and the fever coming on soon, the great Timosha would have hell to pay."

Noshan walked to the door, hesitated and turned about.

"Except for Dauna," his voice was low.

A sigh escaped Wells' lips.

"That's the whole damned trouble," he admitted. "The boys could fight their way out. Dauna wouldn't have a chance."

"We've faced this thing for six months now," Noshan said. "Better try and stick it out to the end. The Chinese are in Kweiyang. They may manage to break through."

Wells chuckled dryly.

"And when they get here, the Japs will calmly march us all over the *bridge*. A lot of good they'll do us, once Timosha decides we're useless."

"TEX" WALLACE, and "Gab" Harnet had one thing in common. What they lacked in medical knowledge they made up as good company to each other. Collectively, "Rick" O'Conner, "Tex" and "Gab" were known as the *eightballs*.

"Tex" characterized the term for O'Conner one night at the Royal Hotel in Manila. The three of them had just knocked hell out of half of the hotel's population. It had been a great party, built on too many bottles and a blonde with a temper. When the melee calmed down, "Tex" had dragged himself to the bar where "Rick" and "Gab" were already deep in a bottle. Raising himself to full height, he had proposed a toast.

"Here's to the eightballs; a name for

three guys who are plenty tough!"

Now, comfortably bogged down in the hospital kitchen, Tex and Gab gnawed chicken bones and waited for Rick O'Conner to return

Gab Harnet weighed two hundred in the raw. His face was flabby with fat, but the remainder of his body turned every bit of food into muscle. He drawled when he talked.

"Trouble with Rick," Gab said dolefully. "He always thinks we're kidding him. Wait 'till he sees that crazy bridge in action. I've seen a hundred slant-eyes go across that mess of swaying shrubbery and none of them came back."

Tex looked out through the fly-covered screen and across the dusty compound. Rick O'Conner was just coming from the trail where it entered the forest.

"Speak of the devil . . ."

O'Conner came in slowly and seated himself in one corner. The room was silent but for the buzzing army of flies still trying to invade the questionably clean kitchen.

"Well," Tex asked, "do you believe it now?"

O'Conner still stared at the floor. He nodded his head.

"Then pay up," Gab broke in. "Tex and me celebrated while you were gone. Had one American chicken and we hated for old Timosha to find it."

"You don't deserve one fin of my hard earned dough," Rick reached into his pocket. "Fine pals you are, eating the last American chow we'll see for weeks. Or—forever . . ."

"Cut it." Gab said sharply. "You been hanging black curtains for a month now. Timosha needs us until he gets reinforcements and supplies. He ain't gonna murder his own saviors, or somethin'."

"That's the point," Tex insisted. "Burma is full of Japs. If it wasn't for those attacks along the border, he'd a' had his men and supplies weeks ago."

Rick O'Conner raided the ice box and settled down with a chunk of cold beef. The compound was empty and deserted. The sun climbed high and hot against the cloudless sky.

"Rick," Gab asked slowly. "What's burning? You didn't get sick down there?"

O'Conner straightened up. He licked his fingers after the last bite of beef and wiped them on a handkerchief.

"That prisoner, Aben Dagh. Who was he?"

"Burmese," Tex said. "The Japs captured him while trying to sneak up on a Jap encampment."

"He had an odd look," Rick confessed. "Unless I'd seen him walk straight into nothingness, I'd have sworn he wasn't afraid of crossing that bridge."

Gab's breath sucked in noisily. He started to say something, and stopped, mouth open.

"Go on," O'Conner prompted. "What's burning you?"

"What you said," Gab whispered. "Look, I heard something funny last night. I thought I wouldn't say anything, but now I gotta."

His companions were silent.

"I was peekin' around for a pint of whisky after dark last night. I ran nose on to a couple of Chinks over by the hotel. They were talking about Aben Dagh."

O'Conner leaned forward.

"Go on."

"I can't make out much of that talk they throw around," Gab admitted, "but this I'm sure of. They said the prisoner was condemned and they seemed to think it was a joke. They talked about the bridge, but they had another name for it."

"We're waiting." Tex swung his long legs from the table and stood up. *"They called it the bridge of escape."*

A QUICK sigh escaped O'Conner's lips. Tex went to the door and pushed it open and battled a large fly outside. Then he closed the door again and sat down.

"You've got something on your mind," he said to O'Conner. "Ever since you came back that look of mystery has encompassed your stern mug. Give—will you?"

O'Conner stared at him as though looking straight through the Texan.

"I been thinking a lot about Aben Dagh," he confessed. "The Japs are smart enough to know that the bridge is a quick, easy way to get rid of their prisoners They don't stop to figure what happens to them."

"So?"

O'Conner arose, tossed a bit of bone into the garbage can and strode up and down the room. As he walked, he started to talk again, as though thinking as he moved.

"I'm crazy," he admitted. "The sun and the Japs have got me off stride. But . . ."

"But what?" Tex asked.

O'Conner stopped suddenly and faced the pair almost fiercely.

"I think that Aben Dagh is no more dead at this moment than you or I. I've got an idea that bridge *is* a manner of *escape*. Maybe it's not pleasant, but at least the Chinese don't seem to fear it much."

"Then why doesn't every Chink in the place cross the bridge," Gab faltered. "If it's as easy as that."

O'Conner grunted.

"Try a harder one on me," he asked. "I've thought this thing out carefully. If the Chinese sit tight, they are safe for the time being. When the Japs get rid of a man, instead of shooting him, they send him across the bridge. They are superstitious enough to believe that he walks to his death. The Chinese are biding their time. Until they give the bridge away, their countrymen are safe from the firing squad. Does it make sense?"

"It does," Tex Wallace agreed. "It makes sense and it presents some nice ideas."

O'Conner cocked his helmet on one side of his head and opened the door.

"That's what I thought," he said. "If you boys hear a strange voice talking from the side of the bed one of these nights, don't mistake it for Grandma's ghost. I've an idea that may put old Timosha in the grave of his ancestors."

THE three eightballs walked past the hospital together. Dauna Wells waved to them from the second story. Gab touched the tips of his fingers to his lips and blew her an airy kiss. Dauna smiled and went on with her work.

The village lay in a dry, dusty valley below the hospital. Jap planes had tore into it with unholy fury, reducing the buildings to rubble. The modern, new hospital, an irritatiing eyesore to the Japs, still stood protected and safe atop the hill. No power of the Red Cross made it thus. Only Timosha and his wish to keep his troops alive and healthy.

O'Conner and his companions crossed the red sand above the building and went quickly down into the small ravine. It was deep and well hidden from the hospital. The Jap troops were quartered on the opposite side of the hill. A little stream cut through the valley and they crossed it silently. Gab stayed where he could see anyone who approached from any direction.

Tex followed O'Conner to the far end of the ravine. They drew away a couple of thin rock slabs and tugged at the low shrubs that hid a hole in the side of the hill.

"One American tank," O'Conner said lovingly. "Full of hell and gasoline. If we only had an army to back us up."

The tank, a standard medium weight affair, stood in the cave opening, its treads oiled and clean. A wicked looking 37mm. cannon protruded from the business-like turret.

"Okay!" Tex said. "I've seen it before. You were lucky as hell to get it up here and hidden before the Japs came, but what good is it against Timosha's boys?"

Apparently satisfied that the tank was still safe, O'Conner covered the opening quickly and carefully.

Gab met them at the head of the ravine.

"No one within a mile," he said. "What's up?"

"Nothing yet," O'Conner admitted. "But I think something *will* be in a few hours. I don't know what's going to happen when I cross that bridge, but if I am any good at guessing, an invisible tank could do a hell of a lot of damage here, in spite of Jap preparations."

SOON after midnight, Dauna Wells heard a light footstep in the hall outside her door. The moon was gone and no light entered the small room. She drew on her slippers and robe. At the door she hesitated. With it locked, she was safe. But her father's door was only a few feet away. Perhaps it was only one of the patients wandering about in the cold. She unlocked and pushed the door open silently and looked toward the red light that marked the fire escape. A man was going through the door.

"Rick!" Her voice was a loud whisper. "It's Dauna, wait."

Rick O'Conner turned. His face registered irritation at being discovered. He was fully dressed and he carried a stubby automatic rifle under his arm. His belt was full of grenades and a pair of field glasses hung from his waist.

He was at her side in an instant, pressing her back into her room. His face, stern and purposeful, warned her to be silent. Once inside, he pushed the door closed and listened. No sound come from outside.

"You should have stayed in bed," he said. "You had no business . . ."

The girl was angry. She hated being pushed around and Rick had been mean for several days.

"Don't talk that way to me, Rick O'Conner," she said, and her breathing was suddenly hard. "Just because Walter has been kind . . ."

"Shut up," O'Conner said pointedly. "I'll talk. You were my girl. That's putting it bluntly, I know, but I don't beat around the bush. This two-bit screen lover has been giving you the works and you fall for it. You've been giving him the go sign for months. When I'm washed up, I know it. All I ask is that you leave me alone now and don't gum up the works."

A tear glistened in Dauna Well's eye, but her voice was still firm.

"Go on. Finish any hair-brained scheme you have. Walter Noshan is at least a gentleman."

"*Gentleman!*" O'Conner's voice was filled with biting sarcasm. "He's so gentle that the sight of blood sent him screaming from the line at Kweiyang. I wouldn't trust him . . ."

Dauna was both frightened and angry now. She had never seen Rick so determined and bitter. His equipment told her he was about to attempt something foolhardy.

"Rick, please," her voice was husky with concern. "Perhaps I've been thoughtless. Walter Noshan has tried to make me comfortable here."

"And I've been trying to find a way to get us out of this mess," O'Conner's teeth grated. "I haven't had time for moonlight and roses."

DAUNA tried to reason with him. She tried to show her fear for his safety, but the man was beyond fear. She gave up the attempt, opened the door quickly.

"All right, go get yourself killed. I won't tell a soul. You might at least hear what I have to say."

O'Conner passed her in the door. He wanted to reach over and draw her to him. To kiss the anger from those straight, tight lips. Instead once outside the room he turned and looked at her quietly.

"You may have a chance to prove that you want to help me," he said quietly. "I'll be seeing you."

She clutched his arm tightly and held on.

"Rick, please, where are you going? The gun? You haven't a chance if you use it."

"The gun has been hidden too long now," he said tonelessly. "As for me, you might ask Tex in the morning. I'd rather no one knew tonight."

He went the length of the hall quickly, stepped to the iron ladder outside and swung down it.

The night was perfect for his plans. The jungle hid Rick O'Conner as it hid the wild beasts that lived within it. He followed the trail swiftly, knowing no Japs were necessary to guard the place. The roar of the river came to him from the opening ahead.

O'Conner reached the head of the vine footbridge with pounding heart. It wasn't an easy thing, to walk calmly into what might be death for him. A strong wind whipped through the canyon. He stopped, and slipped the automatic rifle carefully into his belt. With both hands firmly on the vines, he waited. The footbridge swayed wildly back and forth under the force of the gale.

"Here goes nothing!" O'Conner whispered.

The bridge was unstable and like a living thing under his tread. Remembering Aben Dagh, he stopped a quarter of the way across and looked back.

A lantern bobbed on the trail. In its light, he could see Dauna, Walter Noshan and a Japanese soldier running toward him. He wanted to go back; wanted to murder Noshan with his bare hands. And why had Dauna betrayed him?

"Rick—Rick O'Conner." It was Dauna's voice, high-pitched with fear and hysteria. "Please, Rick, it's death."

NOSHAN was shouting wildly, his dark face partly visible in the lantern light. The Jap soldier raised his rifle and aimed it toward the bridge. Dauna, ahead of him, would not see the action.

O'Conner started to run blindly toward the other side of the chasm. If they managed to shoot him now . . .

The center of the span was close. Aben Dagh had approached it calmly, well poised. O'Conner ran.

Crack.

The song of the bullet passed over his head.

He reached the center of the bridge.

Crack.

The second shot was closer. A strange dizziness came over O'Conner. He faltered, tripped on a twisted vine and fell forward. Had he been hit? Through the maze of the bridge he could see the slim, straight arrow of the river shooting toward its goal. He was suddenly bathed with heat. It passed over his body as though a furnace had been opened in his face. The black tidal wave of night swept across him and the river. The scraping vines against his face vanished.

"Rick—Please come back . . ." It was Dauna, her voice far away and fading with every word. Then, nothingness.

GENERAL TIMOSHA was a clever man. There were those among the younger leaders of his army who would have long ago done away with Marshall Wells and his company. Timosha had remained adamant.

"An army remains strong only with food and medical attention."

This was his one civilized thought, and it remained intact only so far as his own army was concerned. This, perhaps, was why the bridge appealed so much to the little warrior. Although frightening even to him, he found the bridge an ammunition saver. It was quick and clean when it came to disposing of his enemies.

Timosha was not in a pleasant mood this morning. He was excited and perturbed. He came with a small detachment of men, strutted into the open compound before the building and commanded them to halt. His men, like puppets, looked much alike. They were gray with dust and their eyes seemed more slanted than ever, puffed with their early arising.

Marshall Wells met him at the door. The old surgeon had had only time to don his robe and get downstairs before the general reached the door. They met as always, in keen distrust of each other's inner thoughts.

"The general arises early," Wells said and led the way into the small, bare office at the rear of the building. "What does he wish from us?"

Timosha was silent. He sat down on one of the straight chairs and removed his cap.

"Last night your attaché, O'Conner, crossed the bridge." His voice was expressionless.

Wells nodded. The news had troubled him deeply, since Noshan and Dauna had told him upon their return to the hospital.

"I know," he answered. "The man must have gone mad. He wasn't the type to stand imprisonment."

"Imprisonment?" Timosha's eyes lifted. "I am sure you are all well treated and safe here."

Wells retracted his statement carefully.

"To the American, O'Conner," he said. "Fighting was the only thing reasonable. You know of men who stop thinking normally unless they are under terrific punishment?"

Timosha nodded.

"Perhaps there are others who feel the same," he asked innocently.

Wells shook his head.

"No, I think not. The others will work for their safety. Only O'Conner was a problem. It may be well that he is gone."

MARSHALL WELLS was stalling. No such wish entered his mind. He hoped fervently that O'Conner was somehow safe. Rick had been a good man. Too good a man to lose. He watched Timosha's face closely. The general arose and faced him. His legs were spread far apart. He held his riding quirt tightly in his gloved fist.

"My spies report that the other Americans, you call them Tex Wallace and Gab Harnett," he pronounced the names with difficulty, "were with O'Conner constantly."

Wells agreed with a nod.

"They are few against many," he answered. "It is only natural that they stay to themselves. They are both good men."

If he expected the Jap to take this statement calmly, he was mistaken. Timosha's body grew rigid.

"We cannot take chances," he said. "The two must be locked up. That will leave you, your daughter and Noshan to work here.

"A force of our men are on the way here from Burma," the general added. "They will be several days in transit. When they reach us, you also will be safely taken care of."

Marshall Wells, at any other time, might have let the words frighten him. But now, as Timosha left the office, he slammed the door bitterly. Tex and Gab would be out of the picture. O'Conner had quit. He wondered what would become of Dauna, once the Jap force was complete.

Through the window Wells saw Jap soldiers prodding Tex and Gab not too gently with their bayonets.

RICK O'CONNER had been partly aware of what he faced. So aware of it that had Dauna not found him, and the Japanese soldier not opened fire as he stood on the bridge, Rick might have turned back. Now, he was glad he had not.

He opened his eyes slowly, realizing that the heat had died and he was lying full length on the ground at the opposite end of the bridge.

He stood up to make sure of this, and then stared down at his own body. He was not invisible or changed in any form. He still carried the rifle and the grenades were strung about his waist. He stepped toward the chasm. It was daylight. He had crossed the bridge and flopped into the undergrowth. No telling how long he had been thus.

Something moved and glinted in the sun across the river. Japs were coming down the trail from the hospital. Straining his eyes, he tried to make out who was with them.

Tex and Gab walked in front of the small group.

Their shirts had been torn off. They walked silently, facing straight ahead. Quickly, O'Conner stepped behind a tree.

Then he realized that it had been needless. From his hiding place, he could make out a Jap, only his head showing above the foliage across the river. There were three of them, now that his eyes picked them out. A machine gun had been placed at the edge of the chasm a few yards from the bridgehead.

They had been there all the time.

He had stood in plain sight of them, not fifty yards away and they had never opened fire. The knowledge of it made him excited in a way he had never felt before. A strange new feeling of power swept through him as he realized he had supposedly been in plain sight of the Jap machine gun crew and they had not fired upon him.

Then, although to himself, he was entirely normal—evidently he was invisible to the others.

O'Conner stepped toward the head of the bridge. He'd have to give this thing a test sooner or later. Making sure the men in the machine gun nest were looking toward him, he stood in plain sight of them, waved a hand and then ducked back behind the trees. They made no move to fire.

TEX and Gab were at the opposite end of the bridge. Obviously they were going to be forced to walk it.

Timosha had grown wiser during the last few hours. Those machine gunners were hidden in the forest for a purpose. As Tex started across the bridge, O'Conner saw one of the gunners arise, cross and kneel before the gun.

Timosha was taking no chances. Tex and Gab would be mowed down before they reached the center of the span.

O'Conner could see the white, bloodless face of Tex Wallace as the slim Texan started out across the vines. Gab's heavy body plowed behind him, and the bridge started swaying under their combined weight.

O'Conner went to one knee, the automatic rifle balanced against his shoulder. The machine gunner had both hands on the firing end of his weapon. Tex would be picked off before he could get ten feet out on the span.

Crack.

O'Conner's rifle sent lead straight into the Jap's forehead. The man twitched backward and dropped out of sight. A shout of anger arose from the far side of the river. Automatically, face expressionless, a new man pushed the body away and clutched the barrel of the machine gun.

"Run for it, Tex!"

Tex looked ahead of him, recognized Rick O'Conner's voice and started to run. Gab, not so fortunate, slipped and fell heavily. A hand grenade arched high above the chasm from O'Conner's right hand and the machine gun blew straight into the air.

"Rick," Tex sounded frightened. "Where in hell are you?"

"Keep moving," O'Conner said. "You'll see me in a minute."

He was already on the bridge. Tex reached the center and fell forward on his face. He kept crawling slowly forward, clutching his throat with one hand.

"Rick, Rick! I think I've been hit. It's hotter than the devil."

O'Conner reached Tex and vaulted over him. Gab was trying to rise. A Jap officer raised his pistol and fired at point blank range. A quiver passed through Gab's paunchy figure and he lay still.

"Gab!"

O'Conner, not even a shadow on the bridge, reached down and tried to lift him.

TEX was still crawling, close to the far end of the bridge. O'Conner could see him, but he knew that to other eyes, Tex had already passed from sight.

Gab lifted his head slowly.

"Rick—what the hell. I don't get it."

"Shut up and try to crawl," O'Conner whispered. "I'm here all right. You can't see me."

More bullets tore from the group of Japs. The Japs were almost on the bridge, but they dared not advance across it.

O'Conner hurled a grenade toward them and saw two men go down. He lifted Gab under the armpits and started to tug him across the bridge. The vines under him gave way and he fell, arose and went on again.

They were cutting away the supports.

A half-dozen long, cable-like vines reached into the trees on each side of the gorge. Japs were slashing at them with their sabers.

O'Conner managed to reach the center of the bridge.

"Leave me." Gab tried to catch his breath and O'Conner knew he was suffering with the wound and with the heat. "I'm done for. They'll drop us both into the river."

"Shut up," O'Conner grunted and kept on tugging. Gab regained some of his strength and pushed with his feet. Two of the cables had already parted.

The bridge sagged wildly on one side.

The Japs stopped cutting. They had just seen two men disappear from sight. They had forgotten, in the excitement, to go on with the task of hacking the bridge apart. Timosha himself, and a small group of soldiers were hurrying down the trail. O'Conner dragged Gab the rest of the way to safety.

Tex was stretched out on the grass, seemingly in a deep sleep. O'Conner dragged Gab to the side of the Texan and with his handkerchief, stopped the flow of blood from Gab's wounded shoulder.

Gab's breath was coming more evenly now.

Then, for the time being, the three of them were safe. O'Conner stood up, tried to resist the temptation of hurling another grenade at Timosha's men and thought better of it. No use drawing their fire if he could prevent it. For the time being, they were safe, *and unseen.*

Three men against an army were not many, but three shadows—three men who could go directly into the enemy's camp without being seen should prove a power to be reckoned with.

"I SEE the American with the red hair has found our secret."

O'Conner pivoted swiftly, his rifle aimed straight at the head of the giant Burmese, Aben Dagh. "I suggest you drop the rifle before my men misunderstand the action," Aben Dagh went on.

"Good Lord," O'Conner's mouth dropped open. "Robin Hood."

A broad grin lighted Aben Dagh's face. He stood perhaps twenty feet from O'Conner, his gigantic bronzed body covered from head to foot with tight fitting brown skins. On his shoulder he carried a quiver of long arrows; his bow, a mammoth six-foot affair, was strung with one of them. It lay loosely across his wrist.

Behind Aben Dagh, six Chinese stood. They were dressed in the same manner and their faces were jolly and tinged with smiles at O'Conner's bewilderment.

"That is better," Aben Dagh said as O'Conner let the gun hang loosely in his hand. "No, not Robin Hood, I'm afraid. One could hardly call this snake infested swamp Sherwood Forest."

The Burmese was no jungle savage after all. O'Conner had felt the keen intelligence of the man that day Aben had walked the bridge. Now he understood the smile, the lack of fear. Aben had been returning to a land he knew well.

"I—that is—we are on the spot," O'Conner said suddenly. "Last night I crossed the bridge because I had a hunch. My companions were forced to follow me."

Aben nodded.

"I know," he said simply. "We have been watching."

"Then, you saw what they tried to do?"

"I saw that you are a brave man," Aben stepped forward, extending his hand. The arrow had already been replaced in its quiver. "Perhaps we allowed you to go close to death, wondering if you would prove yourself a a fit warrior for our purpose."

O'Conner took his hand and gripped it tightly.

"I don't know what your purpose is," he answered quietly, "but if you're fighting the Japs, count me in."

"Hey," it was Tex Wallace, "for the love-o-Mike, what goes here?"

O'Conner turned to find Tex and Gab on their feet a few feet behind.

"Plenty," he said dryly. "In twenty minutes, you've escaped death by a hair, met a modern Robin Hood and become invisible men."

Gab looked at Tex and a foolish grin twisted his fat mouth.

"The guy's nuts," he said. "If this bulk of mine is invisible . . ."

"Only to those on the other side of the bridge," O'Conner pointed out. "If you don't believe it, look across."

Gab looked at the Japs, still waiting about the far end of the bridge. They were barely fifty yards away, fully armed and yet they made no pretense of opening fire.

"Christopher," Gab exclaimed.

ABEN was growing impatient.

"It will be necessary for you to go before TiSenn, our leader," he said. "We must go at once, before nightfall brings more danger to the jungle."

O'Conner was taken back.

"Then there are more of you?"

A titter of laughter came from one of the Chinese, and Aben smiled.

"Many more," he assured the American. "Come, you will see."

He turned and went silently back into the heavy, dim jungle. O'Conner looked once more at the two men he had saved on the bridge. Gab was staring at Tex as though the Texan was a hoax.

"How those heathens can miss this two hundred pound bulk of mine is more than I can savvy."

"Don't worry, Gab," O'Conner grinned. "You haven't lost a pound. It takes the same amount of lead to kill an invisible man as it does a normal one. Better get moving."

They followed him quickly, taking a last look across the bridge where, under Timosha's orders, Jap soldiers were hard at work repairing the supports that held the bridge.

Aben and his men were already ahead, walking quietly and swiftly through the forest. O'Conner followed, making sure that Gab was well enough to keep up. Aben moved along the small trail as though it were main street. The man was familiar with every stick and stone.

This was something that O'Conner had not reckoned with. It was only logical that when men disappeared from the world, they must go somewhere. Yet, meeting Aben Dagh and learning that many men dwelt here on the other side of the gorge had surprised him. Try as he might, O'Conner could make no plans now beyond his nose. This was an astonishing new world. A world where men lived normally and yet were shut from their old companions by the simple problem of sight. It was as though Dauna Wells and Timosha and everyone in the world were blind. As though he dwelt on a same plane of living, and yet could not be understood simply because they were unable to see that he existed.

ABEN was slowing down now. O'Conner saw that the swamp was deeper and the trail blotted out in the gumbo underfoot.

"You will jump from one dry place to another," Aben had stopped and turned around. "Make sure your feet do not slip. We have but a mile to go."

The three of them, Americans with a lost past, went forward cautiously. Black, stinking mud gurgled around the tiny grass spots they jumped on. The thick, vine-clad trees towered up and interlaced with each other.

Then, ahead, there was light. They reached high ground and came out into a grassy opening. Ahead of them was blue sky.

"The city of Twung," Aben said

shortly and O'Conner went to the edge of the cliff they had approached.

A quick sigh escaped his lips. Then this was the hiding place of the invisible men of China. Spread out across the fertile valley below was a great city. Its buildings were much like any Chinese city. One thing was different. The place was clean and white in the sun. No dust was here and no filth. Instead, broad avenues were bordered with bright flowers and green grassy slopes. He imagined it must be a sort of Chinese heaven to the doomed men who came here.

"The palace of TiSenn," Aben was at his side, pointing toward the square, squat building in the very center of Twung. "We go there at once."

AS THEY approached the palace O'Conner grew increasingly aware of the respect paid to Aben Dagh. The city, as he saw it at close range, was a thriving place of many merchants and thrifty shops. There were no high walls or dark, warlike gates. Horses were waiting them at the edge of the jungle and they rode down the avenue, ever closer to the center of Twung.

Men and women came from their places of business and bowed low to Aben as he passed. He smiled at them, waving a friendly hand as the party moved forward. Riding close to O'Conner, he said:

"Of course you are surprised. I will try to tell you something of Twung. TiSenn will enjoy telling you more."

"Thanks," O'Conner answered. "But right now I'm anxious to get a crack at Timosha. I'm worried about Dauna Wells and her father."

Aben's face darkened slightly.

"You have time later," he said. "Now, of Twung. We know nothing about the gorge of disappearance. Why our bodies change when we cross it, we have not fathomed. Twung was built centuries ago as a refuge for the men and women who come here. TiSenn has ruled for half a century and his father before him. Bandits and criminals are eliminated."

"Then you don't allow everyone to stay here?" O'Conner had been wondering about that.

Aben's lips parted in a smile.

"The *elimination* of the unsuitable is my task," he confessed. "TiSenn is a kind man. He does not talk much of the business I handle."

That was why Aben had commanded so much respect, O'Conner thought grimly. Thank God the tall Burmese hadn't decided that he and his companions were unfit for Twung.

"Others who come here," Aben continued, "are given a shop or a trade. They thrive and are happy."

"But surely you must have an outside source for food and goods?"

Aben smiled.

"That is also my task," he said. "You mentioned that I was a Robin Hood. Out of Burma come caravans of teak, sapphires, rubies and jade. We do not touch honest men. Fortunately, for us, a great number of bandits bring their loot along the Burma road. It is no crime to rob these fat gluttons to feed our honest men."

"I'm beginning to like you a great deal," O'Conner said. "I guess I'd make a good killer myself, if a few Japs and a wagon load of Japanese food and equipment came over the hill while I was waiting."

He felt Aben's hand come down lightly and sincerely against his shoulder.

"That's what I have in mind," the Burmese said quietly. "I've admired you since the day you stared at me with that puzzled look as I crossed the bridge. I need good men. Many here do not care to fight."

"And the girl?" O'Conner persisted. "We can rescue her?"

"That will come in good time," the Burmese insisted. "Time will care for many things."

BECAUSE of Aben's power, they were admitted to the palace of TiSenn without difficulty. O'Conner was surprised at the straight simplicity of the great white halls and the lack of ornate materials. Two guards in the same skin uniforms, bows strung, stood at the entrance. They bowed low as Aben entered, followed by the three Americans.

"Some joint," Gab whispered. "This guy, SenSen goes for big rooms."

TiSenn's chamber was at the far end of a great hall. In the huge throne room were three small chairs placed about a rich, oriental rug. At the fourth corner of the rug was TiSenn's throne. It was covered with dark wine-colored fabric.

"You will be seated," Aben said quietly and his voice echoed through the place. "Our master, TiSenn is a simple man. He does not deal in power, but in love."

O'Conner sat down, ill at ease in his torn, dirty clothing. Aben sat cross-legged on the rug.

An old, old man came to the door behind the throne. His hair was black and sparse, hanging in two pigtails. His face was a mass of wrinkles and the nails of his aged hands were nearly an inch in length.

"Welcome, Aben."

TiSenn's voice was stronger than his body, low and pleasant. He approached the rug, bowed quietly at the three strangers and sat down. His dress was simple, a long gray robe that covered his body to the floor and hung in folds about his wrists.

"You have brought men from beyond the line?"

Aben nodded and stood up.

"We also bring food and jewels from a caravan of *dogs* waylaid on the road," he said. "We leave tomorrow for more riches."

TiSenn was pleased.

"Tell me of yourselves," he addressed O'Conner. "You wish to stay here?"

It was the American's chance. He stood up slowly, bowed and launched into his story of the Yunan Hospital. TiSenn's old face was expressionless, as he told of Timosha and the ruthlessness of the Japanese invaders.

AS O'CONNER talked, he was aware of a gathering storm outside the walls of the palace. The place grew dark and candles in long silver holders were brought by servants and placed beside the throne.

"Six Americans were at Hunan," O'Conner went on, and a sudden clap of thunder silenced him. He waited for the sound to roll back into the hills and continued. "Now there are but three. One is a girl, unprotected and at the mercy of Timosha. It was my wish that you would send men with me to rescue them and perhaps attack the Japs."

TiSenn was silent. Thunder and lightning were tearing down upon the city of Twung now, and they talked only between the attacks from the heavens.

Aben's face told O'Conner nothing. Perhaps he had talked too much. Aben had said that everything would come with time, but time would only serve Timosha and give his troops time to consolidate. God alone knew what the Chinese at Kweiyang would have to face in another week.

At last, TiSenn had made up his mind.

"I can sympathize with your problem," he said slowly. "But, it is unfortunate that I cannot supply men to fight the Japanese people."

"But . . ."

TiSenn held a thin arm aloft.

"Let me speak," he said quickly. "The city of Twung has been founded on peace. We could have attacked the Japanese many times. Through the centuries, many invasions have occurred in this part of China. If we had fought against them, the City would have become a pool of war. Instead, we have taken here only men who hate blood and wish peace."

"Does Aben hate war?" O'Conner asked coolly.

A tinge of red came to the cheeks of the old man and Aben crouched forward, wondering what trouble O'Conner had brought.

"Aben," TiSenn answered, "is at heart a good man. It was necessary that we have food and materials. We cannot become entirely self-supporting."

Tex, sitting quietly beside Gab, heard the faint hum of motors.

He leaned over Gab.

"Bombers!" he whispered.

Gab nodded, only half hearing.

"Aben attacks only bandits," TiSenn was explaining to O'Conner. "He does not fight where policies are concerned."

"The Japs are bandits," O'Conner protested. "They kill men and women as one. They murder children."

Tex's head was cocked on one side, listening.

"If I don't hear Jap bombers," he said aloud, "I'm one myself."

Aben arose, his figure strong and straight. They all listened to the rapidly growing sound.

"They will not harm us," TiSenn said quietly. "Like yourselves, the city of Twung cannot be seen from the air. It, also, is bathed in the air of invisibility."

"Just the same," Tex answered. "Those boys are plenty low. The storm must have forced them down."

It was worse now. Rain slanted down over the city of Twung and thunder crashed time after time, drowning the increasing violence of sound that came from the approaching bomber squadron.

"Can't get above the storm," O'Conner said. "Probably loaded with stuff for Yunan."

Aben still standing alert before his king, uttered one last plea.

"Then you refuse to allow me to fight with these Americans against the Japanese?"

TiSenn nodded.

"I am sorry," he said. "Under the circumstances, you cannot fight."

TISENN arose slowly and crossed the room. They followed him to an outer porch, partly covered, that was supported against the upper wall. Rain swept in and drenched them. TiSenn stood quietly, listening to the storm and the approaching planes.

"Jerusalem," it was Gab. His voice loud with awe. "Here they come."

O'Conner felt the skin on his neck prickle strangely as the huge formation of bombers swept down into the protected valley. The sky was low with black clouds. He wondered how the Japs would get altitude to clear the opposite end.

The first plane dove down suddenly and a half-dozen long sticks dropped from its under side.

"They're dropping their stuff," he whispered. "God pity the city of Twung."

He was right. As they waited, rain pelting down into their faces, ten great bombers swept down one after another, dropped their heavy loads and swept up straight toward the sun they knew would be above the clouds.

In those few minutes, TiSenn, King of Twung, was forced to change his mind. As the heavy bombs dropped into the great city, crushing and destroying huge sections of it, TiSenn turned from a peaceful man into a determined, hard-bitten warrior.

"And all because a gang of Jap bombardiers hit a target they didn't know existed," Tex said to O'Conner as they followed the King back to his room.

"Wait until morning," O'Conner answered. "We'll have an army that will fight."

AS THE hours passed, they waited in a chamber near TiSenn's throne room. Waited while TiSenn received full reports of the damage from every part of his city. At last, he called them to him.

Aben was there, a new light in his eyes. TiSenn stood this time, and refused to rest. His age added fire to the battle light that shone from the old man's eyes.

"Short hours ago," he spoke direct to O'Conner, "I told you that we would not fight the Japanese. If I had listened to Aben, this slaughter might not have occurred."

He caught his breath, speaking in quick, jerky sentences.

"What has happened has changed my mind. I am aware that those flying devils did not mean to hit our city. However, if they had done it deliberately, they could have never killed and destroyed more ruthlessly.

"I have made my decision. Aben will be ready tonight to lead five hundred of my best bowmen to the camp of Yunan. You, Rick O'Conner, will be second in comand.

"Under other circumstances, five hundred men would not be enough."

He paused, smiling thoughtfully. "With my men," he continued, "it will be different."

"Very different," Aben agreed.

A hard smile passed over TiSenn's face.

"A cloak of invisibility is a wonderful power," he said finally. "See that none of my men abuse it. See that they fight for the cause that is good."

RICK O'CONNER had but one thought in mind the next twelve hours. Aben would take care of the Japs. He, O'Conner, had a score to settle with Timosha.

Five hundred of TiSenn's men were marching to Yunan. They were much alike. Kind, healthy men with solemn faces. Their dress was Aben's dress and they carried bows and full quivers.

"You, perhaps, wonder why we are able to keep our invisibility on the far side of the bridge," Aben said, when they were close to the gorge.

O'Conner shook his head.

"I've been doing a *lot* of thinking," he confessed.

Aben smiled.

"A very important point," he said. "It is necessary that you know your own margin of safety. Twung is a city in a horse-shoe-shaped bend of the river. The fourth side is protected by dense swamp through which no man can pass. For some strange reason, we remain unseen by the human eye for ten hours after passing the chasm. By then, the spell which envelops us will wear off. I have timed this carefully and know that our raids must never be longer than ten hours. Mark that point and mark it well. Your life may depend on it."

Gab and Tex were close behind as the army of Twung marched in single file through the dense jungle.

"Ten hours," Gab sighed. "Tex, if I get close to the dead-line with this hunk of flesh, for the love-o-Mike see that I get across the river in time. Timosha's monkeys will think I'm a battleship stranded in the desert."

Tex grunted.

"In ten hours, Timosha won't miss anything but his head," he answered grimly.

Aben was the first to reach the gorge. O'Conner behind him on the trail heard a gasp of surprise escape the Burmese warrior's lips.

"The bridge," Aben rushed forward. "They have destroyed it."

Gab Harnett groaned.

"No bridge and me with my pound of flesh."

O'Conner was at Aben's side. They stood silently, staring down at the river deep in the chasm below.

"Timosha!" Aben said. *"He has finally realized the meaning of the bridge."*

AT THE Red Cross Hospital at Yunan, Dauna Wells and her father were facing their last days. No word had come from Rick O'Conner and his buddies. Marshall Wells had given them up for dead. Walter Noshen was with them at the hospital.

The three of them sat on the porch of the hospital. A storm was clearing over the city. Japanese bombers had come over, flying high and going to the east. The moon was up and Yunan had strangely escaped the fury of the bomber squadron. The air, for the first time in weeks, was clear and they sat quietly, trying to enjoy it.

"I tried to talk sense to O'Conner," Noshan was saying. "I told him we didn't have a chance here. His attitude was bound to endanger our safety. He should have played up to Timosha as I have."

"Our safety, or your own?" Marshall Wells' voice was harsh as he stared with partly closed lids across the compound toward the Jap tents.

Noshen's lips tightened.

"I know you hate me, doctor," he confessed. "I've tried to help you and Dauna since we came here. My friendship with Timosha has finally given us a chance to escape."

The speech had produced the effect he meant it to. Wells, no longer disinterested, turned quickly and stared at him. Dauna's lips opened and an exclamation of surprise escaped.

"But Rick!" she protested. "And Tex and Gab. Are we to desert them?"

The darkness hid Noshan's face.

"They are dead," he said. "Timosha said his men shot them all on the bridge."

"And now the bridge has been destroyed," Wells answered curtly. "I suppose you knew that."

Noshan made no attempt to hide his emotions.

"They were fools," he said. "Timosha will kill those who oppose him. He will kill you also if you don't leave at once. His replacements are due here tomorrow."

"And how do you propose that we leave?"

"Timosha had been grateful to me for the favor I have done him," Noshan continued. "We, at least you and I, are enemies. In spite of that, I will drive the station wagon across the hills to Kweiyang tonight. In a few hours, we will be with the Chinese."

Marshall Wells did not answer for a while, but his jaw was jutting forward angrily. He turned to Dauna.

"We have little choice," he said finally. "I'd do anythiing to get you out of here."

"And suppose I refuse to go?" she asked. "Suppose I would rather stay here and wait for Rick. Defy the Japanese and fight with you here at the hospital."

"Then I would be the proudest father in the world," Wells answered softly. "But my daughter would be facing death and I'd still be a damn fool. No, we'll go to Kweiyang. If the boys were alive, they'd want it this way."

Dauna stood up slowly. Her heart was heavy. She felt as though everything within her was dead. In Kweiyang, at least, she could be of help at the Chinese hospital. She turned toward the door, carefully avoiding Walter Noshan's eyes.

"I'll pack," she said. "I suppose you'll want to start at once."

"The sooner the better," Noshan's answers were curt. "The sooner you are safe, the happier I will be."

IN AN hour, they were on the road to Kweiyang. The desert and the red sandy cliffs were bright as day. Noshan had whispered quick words to the sentry and the station wagon had passed, picked up speed and fled into the night.

"That was simple," Wells whispered to Dauna. "Too simple, I'm afraid."

Dauna was silent. Her thoughts were with Rick O'Conner. Rick was stubborn, but he was brave and honest. That, she thought with a shudder, was more than she could say about Walter Noshan. She knew it now.

Ten miles along the road the station wagon sputtered and came to a halt in a place where the road went through a sharp cut. Marshall Wells followed Noshan from the car and leaned over the hood.

"The engine?" he asked questioningly.

Noshan whirled about quickly, a pistol in his hand. In the rear of the car, Dauna Wells stiffened. The two men stood there, the older one with arms raised, his face white with anger. Walter Noshan's words were hard.

"I cannot take both my passengers to Kweiyang." The gun in his hand wavered dangerously. "It was my intention to see that Dauna reached safety."

Dauna Wells was not a coward. Her hand crept toward the darkness at the bottom of the car, groped about and found the handle of a jack.

"You're rotten, Noshan." Wells' voice was low and choked. "I should have known a snake would never stop crawling on its belly."

The pistol came up slowly and a sneering grin covered Noshan's lips.

"Talk, Marshall," he said. "Talk your head off. I'm in the driver's seat as I have been from the first. This is Timosha's gift for my loyalty. I'm taking Dauna to Kweiyang with me. If she squeals on me, I'll kill her as I'm going to kill you."

Dauna was partly out of the car now, the jack handle firmly grasped in her right hand. Her foot touched the sand and Noshan whirled about, firing quickly. She felt a hot searing pain in her shoulder, whipped the jack handle up and threw it with every ounce of strength within her. Then, with a sob, she fell forward in the sand.

"DAUNA," it was her father's voice. "Good girl! You've taken care of Noshan."

She felt firm hands on her shoulder. He ripped her dress open. Opening her eyes, she saw his kind eyes upon her and felt the torn strip of cloth as it wrapped tightly around the wound.

The sound of a car stopping came from behind them. Three men advanced across the sand to the station wagon. A car, its light burning dimly, was parked on the road. The men were Japs.

"An accident?" It was Timosha himself, his eyes slitted angrily. "Why, it is Marshall Wells and his charming daughter."

Wells was silent, waiting. Timosha went to Noshan's side, lifted him up and then dropped the man with an expression of disgust.

"Dead," he said. "A fit end for a traitor."

Sitting there helplessly as her father faced the men, Dauna Wells wanted to cry. Her eyes were hot and wet.

"Marshall Wells," it was Timosha who spoke his words cutting into her brain like a knife. "You have murdered a man. You must stand trial. You are under arrest."

"Go on," Wells' deliberate, sarcastic voice was an insult to the small Jap. "You intend to kill me one way or the other, get it over with."

Timosha grinned and the expression was burning with hatred.

"It would be so simple to leave you here," he answered. "But the firing squad is more formal. Facing a military firing squad brings out the best, or the worst in a man."

"I'LL be thrown by a longhorn," Tex Wallace said quietly. "So the monkey men knock the bridge down on us. What now?"

O'Conner was already searching about. An army engineer doesn't let any river stay long unbridged, in spite of how hopeless the crossing might seem. Aben halted his men and they waited, seemingly untroubled by the loss.

Aben followed O'Conner, catching up with him amid the trees.

"You have a plan?"

O'Conner shook his head.

"Not much of a plan," he admitted. "Just wondering if there are enough vines here to make another bridge."

The trees were hanging with thick cable-like stuff. O'Conner caught the end of one, hacked it with his knife and tested the strength. Apparently satisfied, he turned to the Burmese.

"It will be dark enough to cross in a couple of hours," he said. "Meanwhile have your men cut as many of these things as they can."

"We must get one man across to work from the other side."

"I'll take care of that," O'Conner promised. "There's no time to waste."

While Aben set his men to work, O'Conner followed the edge of chasm north. With a sharp eye he chose a place where the canyon was narrow and a giant tree grew close to its edge. One branch hung out half-way across.

"Tex."

The Texan came on the run. He saw the tree and the narrow lips of the canyon and grinned understandingly.

"Takes the loss of a bridge to make a monkey out of me, huh?"

O'Conner nodded.

"You're the only man light enough to swing across without breaking a vine," he said. "Think you can make it?"

Tex looked up at the limb overhead and then calculated the distance across the gap.

"I think so," he answered. "I'll have one chance to try."

Aben's men had already collected a pile of long, heavy brown vines. From the pile, O'Conner chose the thickest one he could find. Attaching the end of it around his waist, he climbed the trunk of the tree quickly and made it fast to the limb. When he came down, his face was grim.

"I hate to take a chance with your neck," he said. "Tex, if you let go of that thing before you get across, I'll kill you."

The Texan's face was sober.

"You won't have to," he said.

GAB HARNETT had been standing several feet away watching the proceedings silently.

"Buy me a kite and fly me across," he offered. "Man, this is one time I'm glad a scale can't hold me."

Tex grabbed the end of the vine, tested it with a quick jerk and wrapped it tightly around his wrists.

"Here goes nothin'," he said and backed as far away from the tree as he could. With a running jump, he was in the air.

Swinging back and forth, he gained momentum, shooting far out over the canyon. The vine had reached the apex of its swing. O'Conner waited until Tex swung past him and shouted:

"Now!"

The Texan flew out straight over the chasm, reached the end of the swing and let go. His body seemed to hesitate in mid-air, then fell forward. Grabbing with both hands as he landed, he hit the far bank and lay panting. Then he arose, rubbed the palms of his hands together and grinned across at them.

"Let's build that bridge," he shouted. "It ain't safe alone over here."

With the first cable across and attached to the other side, O'Conner went over hand over hand. In an hour, they had constructed a heavy causeway over which Aben's men marched.

There was no need for caution now. Aben's army could remain on the enemy side of the *time chasm* for ten hours with no danger of being detected. As they climbed the pathway toward the hospital, O'Conner noticed lanterns and much activity near the hospital.

"Wait," he told Aben. "Something going on up there. I think you and I had better look around before we run into more trouble than we can handle."

"Wise talk," the Burmese answered. He held up his hand and the column halted, waiting as silently as ghosts along the trail where it met the road.

"Tex," O'Conner called. "You and Gab stay with the men. If we signal you, come alone. This thing will take planning."

The Texan nodded and the two men went quickly toward the lanterns. As O'Conner reached the front wall of the hospital, he realized with horror what was about to take place. Marshall Wells was there, stripped to the waist, his face to the wall. Timosha and his aides stood by the car on the road.

TEN men stood in a straight line at the edge of the yard, rifles ready.

"You have a last chance to pray to your white God," Timosha's voice rang out in the stillness. Wells' head was bowed, but his lips remained silent.

O'Conner gripped the automatic rifle which he had carefully kept throughout his trip to Twung.

"My friend, Wells," he whispered to Aben. "They've done something with the girl. We've got to save Wells first and then find Dauna."

Aben pointed to the rifle and nodded grimly.

"Take care of the firing squad," he said in a low voice. "I'll get the prisoner away while you work."

O'Conner moved closer. The gravel kicked up under his shoes and the general twirled around nervously. His face turned a trifle pale, but satisfied that he had been mistaken with the sound, Timosha turned once more to the business at hand.

"Attention."

The firing squad snapped to attention, rifles held stiffly.

"Aim."

Aben was on his knees, creeping along the wall where Marshall Wells stood. O'Conner could see him clearly as he whispered something to Wells and saw the doctor's figure stiffen. O'Conner lifted the rifle quickly and fired into the air.

"What was that?"

Timosha wheeled about. The men in the squad reacted at once to the strange occurrence. Some of them whirled about, rifles aimed at the spot. O'Conner took no chances. He fired at point blank range at Timosha and saw the little general go down with a groan. The rifles flashed along the line of the firing squad, but they were shooting at nothing. Afraid he might be hit, O'Conner fell flat on his stomach and fired.

Timosha arose on one elbow, holding his stomach with a bloody hand.

"Retreat to the camp," his voice was weak. *"They are invisible devils."*

The Japs broke ranks and ran wildly across the road and into the brush. O'Conner saw Aben leading Wells through the hospital door and made sure that Timosha was in no condition to fire at them. Then he turned and motioned to Tex Wallace.

In half an hour, Aben and his men were all in the big stone building. O'Conner went straight to Marshall Wells. The doctor was on the third floor lying on a small cot. O'Conner came in quickly and sat down beside him.

"Sorry we have to meet under such odd circumstances," he said.

Wells smiled wanly.

"Aben, I guess you call him, has told me what happened."

"Good," O'Conner answered. "I'm afraid we must be an odd army, but for the time being, a powerful one."

Wells held out his hand in the direction of the voice.

"I can't see you, Rick, but I'm glad you came back. Dauna . . ."

His voice choked with emotion.

"Where is she?"

"Timosha has her somewhere in the camp," Wells answered. "I think she's in his tent."

"Timosha won't do harm for the time being," O'Conner said. "Im going after Dauna."

ABEN had waited without a word until this conversation was finished. Now he had made known his own plans.

"I have the general downstairs," he said. "His wound is not serious. Perhaps, so long as we are already holding him here, we can use his power to get your woman out of the camp."

O'Conner started downstairs, then turned to Wells.

"I'll have Gab take you to safety," he said. "The Japs can't see us, but they will come here soon to search for you."

Wells nodded.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "For the love of God, Rick, find Dauna."

O'Conner reached the first floor to find Gab and Tex Wallace poking fun at Timosha.

"The little general is wearing his neck out trying to see us," Gab said as O'Conner approached. "He's wise to our trick, but it doesn't help him."

"Seems to have eye trouble," Tex drawled.

Timosha sat alone on a small chair. His side was bulging with a huge bandage that Tex had dragged from the supplies. Timosha was afraid. Never before had he been at the mercy of men who were solid and yet could not be seen.

"I demand that you release me at once." His voice was weak and lacked conviction in his own power.

"I've got one task for you," O'Conner crossed the floor swiftly and faced the Jap. "Dauna is within your camp. If I don't bring her out alive, you'll never leave this hospital."

An ugly, forced smile covered Timosha's face.

"You have an offer?"

"I make no offers," O'Conner snarled. "Where the girl is concerned, I'll kill you with my bare hands."

He turned to Tex.

"Take this skunk and Marshall Wells to the forest," he said grimly. "See that you and Gab protect both of them. Aben will give you ten men."

A gasp of surprise escaped Timosha's lips.

"Ten men . . ."

O'Conner whirled upon him.

"Yes, ten—and many more. You and your monkeys are against an army this time. An army of men who will fight unseen."

O'CONNER crossed the road swiftly, making sure that his footsteps were unheard. Timosha's camp was stretched out on the top of the hill, hundreds of tents with lanterns that flickered in the night. Sentries had been posted on all sides. Machine guns and rifles had appeared in profusion since the attack.

O'Conner passed the line safely and went down the row of tents. Everywhere, the place was alive with chattering groups of Japs. These men could fight and fight well what they could see. The strange story of the firing squad was on all their lips. They had no wish to venture from the camp lines, even in search of their brave general.

Timosha's tent was not hard to find. O'Conner knew he must murder the sentry who stood guard at the big, circular tent in the center of the camp. The man was alert and frightened, standing before the flap of canvas. O'Conner wondered if they had tied the girl up and decided they would take this precaution. Standing close to the wall, he thought of cutting the canvas and entering that way. It was useless. They would notice it at once.

Already two hours had passed since they crossed the *time chasm*. They had but eight hours now to sweep Timosha's army away. He went toward the guard, raised his rifle and brought it down coolly and with great force on the man's head. Before the body hit the ground, he dragged it into the tent. Listening, he heard no sound of alarm from outside.

He heard a gasp of terror escape Dauna's lips, pivoted and saw her lying across a cot, her arms and ankles bound firmly.

"Be quiet," he said in a low voice. "It's Rick. Don't be frightened."

"Rick." She looked quickly about the tent. "But I don't see . . ."

He was at her side, one hand on her arm.

"I'm invisible. Your father's safe and I've come for you. I'll explain later."

He paid no attention to her questions, cutting the ropes quickly. He picked her up and placed her on her feet.

"But, Rick, it's your voice and not your body. I don't understand."

Forgetting where he was, O'Conner bent her to him and kissed her firmly on the lips.

"Now, is there any doubt?"

Dauna's face was white, but she understood that it was Rick's voice and

Rick's body.

"The tank," he said. "We've got to get to it!"

"But Rick, I can't understand how . . ."

He pressed a finger to her lips.

"Don't try," he urged. "We'll go to the tank in the ravine."

"But how can I get there without them seeing me?"

He started to undress the dead sentry, taking only the trousers, cap and shirt.

"Here, get into these. Go out and walk straight down the path. If anyone speaks to you, say nothing. I'll be right behind you with a rifle."

SHE took the sentry's gun and with a frightened, questioning look at the spot where she knew Rick stood, opened the tent flap and went out. No one seemed to have noticed what had taken place. They went carefully down the line of tents.

A figure loomed up in the darkness. The Jap's challenging voice was tense.

Dauna stopped with his rifle in her face. She kept her head down carefully. The Jap started to question her sharply in Japanese. Then his body stiffened suddenly and the rifle fell from his hands. He pitched forward against her and fell to the ground. A deep, bloody wound was in his back.

"Now," O'Conner whispered. "The ravine and quick."

A high pitched cry came from the direction of Timosha's tent. It was taken up quickly on all sides. They raced into the ravine, and into the cave.

"In, quick," O'Conner pushed the girl up the side of the metal monster, "They've found the dead sentry."

Timosha's soldiers were rushing about wildly now, lanterns were bobbing on all sides. Quickly, O'Conner lifted the turret and they dropped into the interior.

O'Conner found the controls and switched on the ignition system. Light flashed out in front of them and the engine started with a roar. He backed and twisted the tank out of its hiding place and they rumbled swiftly from the enclosure.

Dauna started to laugh hysterically.

"Hold it," he said. "Can you work the gun?"

"I'm sorry. No, I can't."

"And the laugh?" he asked.

"It's all so crazy," she answered. "I'm sitting here riding without a driver, and the driver who *isn't,* talks like Rick O'Conner."

They were on the road now, heading straight for the hospital.

"Any doubt of me, after that kiss?" he asked.

"Rick," she clutched his arm quickly. "Jap tanks!"

He stared into the rear-view mirror and saw three heavy machines rumbling out of the camp and onto the road behind them.

"They'll shoot us out of this thing in three minutes," he said shortly. "I could escape, but they'll see you."

"Rick," she begged. "Take a chance. We'll burn if we stay in this."

The tanks were close now. Already one of them had opened fire sending a stream of lead overhead.

"Got an idea," Rick said grimly. "Hold tight. We may die, but we'll do it our own way."

She held his arm now, clung to what she could not see and found it strong.

THE road forked. On the left was the trail down the hill. The trail to the chasm. He jerked on the lever and the machine twisted around and plunged down the narrow trail.

The tank behind turned also.

"They think they've got us trapped," he said.

The tank was ploughing and bucking its way ahead now, tearing through the small trees that got in the way. The Jap tanks had halted and soldiers poured from behind them, rifles firing with deadly precision. The dark slit of the gorge was under his lights.

"Out!" shouted O'Conner. "Climb out and across that vine bridge under cover of the tank."

Dauna clambered out, ran for the gorge. O'Conner went with her, and they plunged on across. Behind them the Japs blazed away at the tank. Finally one Jap threw a grenade and it exploded with a roar. Several Japs poked around in the ruins, then, obviously puzzled, they retreated.

"We made it," Rick's voice held no triumph. It was harsh and thankful for the manner in which they had achieved the impossible.

Dauna Wells lifted her head and saw brown cloth close to her eyes. Tears flooded down her face as she looked up at his rugged face.

"Rick," she said, her voice ringing with emotion. "Rick, darling, don't ever do that again, Rick. I can see you now, and I love you for what you've done."

O'Conner held her tightly.

"It's sort of funny," he said finally. "You can see me, and old Timosha's boys can't see you. Looks as though we can do business with him now."

AFTER Rick O'Conner had gone into the Japanese camp, Aben watched closely the events that followed. He knew that the American would work best alone. Yet, when so many shots were fired and the tanks roared on the road, he was sure that O'Conner had been captured. The Japanese were ready to march on Kweiyang.

Aben had fought for this opportunity to lead an invisible army. O'Conner had his personal problems and Aben had already done much to help him solve them. Now the Japanese would march to Kweiyang and destroy more Chinese cities. Also, the Japs were carrying much equipment and food that would be useful to Twung. Aben called Tex and Gab to him in the room downstairs. They spoke openly before Timosha, believing the little general to be harmless.

"We have already spent three hours of our time here," Aben said. "I think it time we finish what we came to do."

Tex was worried. He wondered if O'Conner had walked into a trap, but knew it was useless to mention it. Rick had a way of taking care of himself. Aben had treated them well. He deserved cooperation.

"Okay by me," he said at last. "How we gonna' handle this job?"

Gab Harnett had an idea.

"Look, Tex," he begged. "Maybe Rick is held prisoner. Why not try an exchange for this half-pint stinker. We'll make a trade and save Rick."

Aben looked interested and Tex nodded.

"Sounds good," he turned to Timosha. "If we stand you out there on the road where you can howl your head off, will you tell them to send Rick to us?"

Timosha stood up, some of the fright he had shown was vanishing.

"If he is in the camp, I will see that he goes free. In turn, you must let me return safely within my own lines."

Aben clutched the little general's arm firmly.

"There will be ten men with strung bows at your back," he snarled. "Make sure you do not betray us."

Timosha's voice was smooth and reassuring.

"There will be no mistake."

Aben motioned for a few of his men and quietly instructed them.

The group went out under the dark sky and across the road. At the edge of the camp, Timosha felt himself yanked to a rude halt.

"This will be far enough," Aben said. "Now—call your men."

TIMOSHA raised his voice and a startled sentry came toward him on the run. Seeing the general standing alone and apparently unharmed, others followed.

"Keep your mouth closed until we tell you to talk," Tex said coldly. "Then talk fast and in English."

Timosha nodded and glanced nervously behind him. Were these actually men or ghosts, he wondered. Horrible, solid ghosts that ordered him about like a puppet. In the heart of the general was a bravery of sorts. This was his sacrifice. His last gesture of defiance in the face of the white men. At least twenty men stood before him now, wide eyed, wondering why their leader had called them.

"Now," Tex whispered close to the general's ear.

Timosha gritted his teeth and started to talk speedily in Japanese.

"Cut that," Tex's voice was ice cold in his ear. *"English or I'll shoot."*

Timosha ignored him, shouting now as fast as he could speak.

"Tell my officers to march against Kweiyang at once. Spare no one. You are faced by men who cannot be seen but who can be shot. Aim your guns at every open spot and fire. Use the flame throwers and tanks in the assault at Kweiyang . . . "

A sob escaped his throat and before the frightened group of Japs, General Timosha sank down to the ground and died with his face in the dirt. A clean, dark bullet hole was in his heart. Before the report of the gun had died, the Japs were fleeing wildly toward their tents. Three of them flopped in the dirt before they had gone ten feet. Long, invisible arrows were buried between their shoulders. The remainder reached the encampment and disappeared, shouting wildly in the darkness.

"We will leave here at once," Aben said. "There must be a spot on the road to Kweiyang where we can stop their advance."

FIVE hours had passed since Tex Wallace had swung across the *time chasm*. Now, Aben and his army were stretched across a rocky promontory above the road. This way the Japanese army would come. Here, where the road narrowed and went between high rock walls, the invisible bowmen were ready.

Aben sat alone with the two Americans, waiting impatiently for some sign of the advance.

"If they wait until daylight, we are lost," he said finally. "Five hours will make my men visible and armed only with arrows against powerful guns."

Tex grinned happily.

"We came, we saw," he said suddenly pointing toward Yunan. "Now they've come and we'll conquer."

Aben sprang to his feet, straining his eyes into the night. A faintly visible rise of dust was floating above the flat land.

"You know the plan," he said calmly.

Tex nodded.

"Gab and I will take a dozen men to the far side of the road where it enters the cut," he said. "We'll make a lot of commotion and draw the tanks and heavy stuff that way. You sweep in and cut them off on the other side."

Aben nodded, and put out his hand.

"Good luck," he said. "I hope your friend is safe."

"Thanks," Tex shook hands and backed away, anxious to get started. "If we don't meet again, tell the King of Twung it was nice being unseen for awhile. Gives a dope like me the chance to play king."

The Japanese troops were in sight now, moving at a slow pace along the road. Tanks led the column. Behind them the long line of marching men walked with guns ready for a surprise attack. After what had happened, the soldiers of Timosha were taking no chances.

Tex led his men quickly along the ridge and down into the desert. The oncoming troops were five hundred yards away, tanks ready to mow down anything that came into sight.

"Now!"

Tex raised one arm as a signal and the men behind him lifted their bows. A rain of arrows sped through the air and picked off men just behind the tanks. The column stopped moving and the men seemed at a loss to know what to do next.

Gab put his hands to his lips and howled a long, bloody war cry. It sounded like an Iowa farmer calling hogs, but it did the trick.

One Jap pointed in the direction of the sound and Tex's men all shouted loudly, making sure their voices would leave no doubt in the Japanese mind where the sound was coming from.

The tanks tipped down the steep bank from the road, gathered speed and came directly at them flame-thrower sweeping burning torches across the sand before them.

"On the double," Tex shouted and started running. They managed to escape the onrushing tanks.

A HIGH pitched scream came from a foot soldier on the road. Aben was attacking from the far side. With his bowmen long anxious to avenge the city of Twung, he was killing arrow for arrow. The Japanese troops were many, but against the invisible army of Twung, they were helpless. The tanks cruised wildly about, first in one direction and then the other, shooting blindly.

To Tex Wallace, it was a mad nightmare. His eyes saw the bowmen as they rushed into the battle, cut their men out cleverly and run away to evade the blind rifle fire.

It was like fighting blind men. Men who were angry and frightened at the same time. At last, close to morning, they were not men, but slobbering, hysterical animals who wandered about in the early daylight, seeking an escape that was impossible. The entire army of Timosha had been cut down during the night. Ten hours had passed since the invisible army of Twung had come for their revenge.

Tex did not know when he first became visible again, but he realized the strange sight must have unnerved the few Japs that were left. They fled across the sand as the men of Twung appeared among them. Timosha's army couldn't have committed suicide at its own hands with more dispatch.

They were safe then, a small army of men who had done their job well and were returning to their peaceful homes.

On the road to the village, they said little. Aben, still a man alone, had gained little pleasure from the slaughter. It had been a necessary thing. Tex and Gab were thinking of O'Conner and Dauna Wells.

"If they were alive when we left," Tex said finally, "the Japs would have murdered them after we shot Timosha."

Gab floundered along without a reply.

A car came toward them and the men halted and stood aside, to let it pass. It was the station wagon in which Marshall Wells and his daughter had first attempted to escape. It stopped, drawing alongside the three leaders. Marshall Wells climbed out stiffly.

"Tex," he said. "Did you manage . . .?"

Tex took the old man's hand.

"Aben's men wiped out the whole flock of them," he said. "Gab and I just sat in on the party."

Wells' eyes twinkled.

"Then you'll be glad that I brought these two along with me," he motioned toward the empty rear seat. Tex stared at the cushion, and an odd look passed over his face.

"Are you nuts?" he asked finally.

Wells smiled.

"I'm sorry," he said. "It is Rick O'Conner and Dauna. They returned to the hospital after you left."

GAB'S mouth flew open.

"You mean to tell me those two are sitting there grinning at us and we can't see a thing?"

"That's what he's saying." It was O'Conner's voice. "Now you know how you *didn't* look last night."

Gab sighed.

"Golly, sure must look good on me," he confessed. "I'd like to take some of this invisible stuff home with me."

"But the time limit," Aben protested. "The spell works off in ten hours."

O'Conner's voice told them quickly what had happened. How he and Dauna had been on the opposite side of the chasm after their escape with the tank.

"I hope we'll meet again, Aben," he finished. "I'm sorry I missed the battle."

Aben stepped close to the car and put out his hand. O'Conner shook it.

"It was I who fought the battle," Aben confessed, "but you were responsible for many things that happened."

A clear, feminine voice came from O'Conner's side.

"I'll say he was," it was Dauna Wells. "And he's going to be busy from now on."

Gab and Tex stood very still, listening to the faint affectionate little sounds that came from the seemingly empty seat.

"Sounds like that invisible business is being used unfairly," Gab said finally. "What goes back there, Rick?"

A happy chuckle—then the sound of a kiss.

"Two more hours before they can see us," O'Conner's voice sounded very happy. "Let's make those boys envious."

Dauna Wells sighed contentedly and the station wagon turned around and started homeward toward the hospital.

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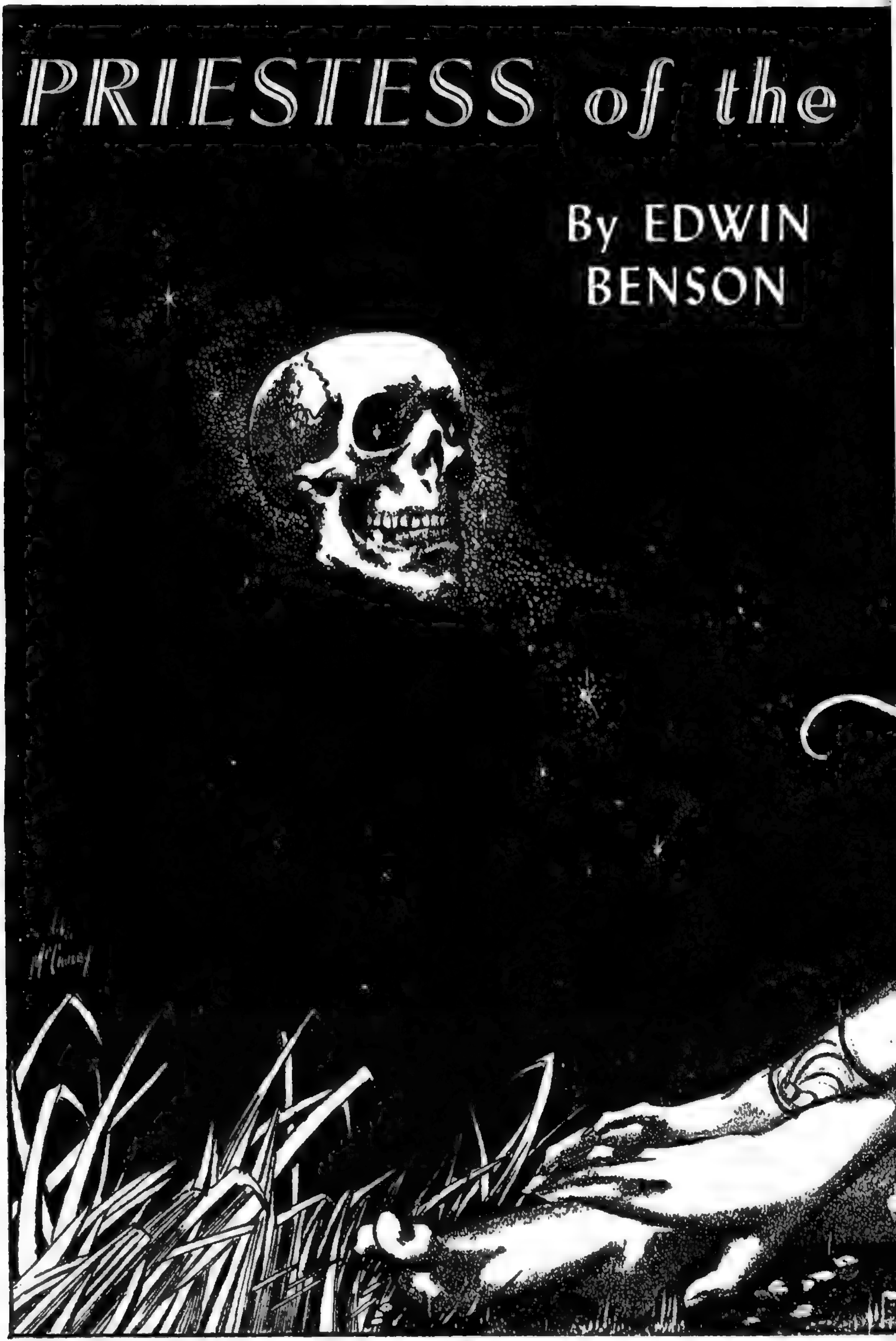

FLOATING SKULL

Eerie death floated through the night at the bidding of a lovely woman—and rode the sky in the cockpits of death-dealing U. S. P-40s

CHAPTER I

The Skull in the Sky

"THE lousy damned skunks! The murdering devils . . ." Pete Vorosh broke off in mid-imprecation to catch the words coming from the radio:

"Hitler's guns thunder tonight at the very gates of Moscow! A giant nation, grim and desperate after two months of the most terrible mechanical warfare ever loosed on the face of the earth, is digging in—old men, women, children—to defend to the last drop of blood the capital city of the Soviet Union. Late today the voice of 'Papa' Stalin rang into the ears of his people in a soul-stirring appeal to hold, whatever the cost; to defend Moscow; to die if need be for Russia in her hour of peril.

"But tonight the fate of Russia seems sealed. Although Hitler is behind the schedule he set for his armies on that morning when his troops launched out toward the Russian border, the Red Army has been unable to do more than delay him.

"Can Moscow hold? That is the question on the lips of every American today. Can the Red Army, already meriting the admiration of world, take the terrible punishment Hitler's panzers are handing out—"

"You bet they can!" Pete roared, pounding a clenched fist on the counter of the little coffee shack. He whirled on his stool to stare at several other grim listeners to the dramatically pitched voice of the newscaster. "Hold? The Red Army will drive Hitler's panzers right back up . . .!"

The door of the coffee shack opened.

"Hey, Pete! Come on. That P-40's ready for an altitude test."

"Ready, hey? By God, I wish I had her over Moscow right now. I'd show those dirty devils a trick or two. Okay, fella, I'm coming. Be right with you."

Pete Vorosh picked up his helmet from the counter and pulled it over his ears. He gathered his heavy gloves into white-knuckled fingers and got off the stool with a swing of his lanky legs. Then he wheeled back, picked up the cup and downed the last of his coffee in one gulp. One bronzed hand buttoned his helmet under his chin as he walked out of the coffee shack. Behind him the radio droned on into the ears of the remaining listeners . . .

". . . reports of the wholesale slaughter of inhabitants of small villages are only partly compensated by the grimness of the Russian scorched earth policy . . ."

He heard no more, but the anger in him seethed on as he strode into the gate leading to the big plant beyond. Even the roar of the machines on the production line that broke around his ears failed to divert his unseeing gaze from the scene that was in his mind's eye.

Moscow! He remembered it only vaguely. He'd been a kid then. Now he was an American—a citizen. And the new Moscow must be vastly different from the city he had known; but just the same, there was a certain feeling there. The feeling everyone has for a place that exists in childhood memories. A nice feeling!

That's why the thought of shells crashing into it, of Stukas and bombers blasting it, of invading Nazis trampling their brutal way forward, intent on smashing it, was so maddening.

SUNLIGHT broke over him again outside the door at the other end of the big shop.

"Hurry it up, Pete," called a mechanic standing beside a gleaming new job, just off the production line. "This baby's waiting to be handled!"

Pete's practiced eye took in the new

gadgets this P-40 had. They were what he was going to test. The army had suggested them, and the company had given all those concerned to understand that they had to be good. That meant Pete's task was of prime importance. If there was any fault in those new gadgets, Pete was supposed to dig it out up there in the blue.

"Just from the looks," he remarked admiringly, "this test's going to be fun! I'll fly hell out of this baby!"

"You'd better," grinned the mechanic. "The army won't like it if they fold up when they get good pilots in 'em."

"Oh yeah!" Pete swung one mittened hand against the mechanic's head in a playful punch. "Listen, Joe, when I get in a pilot's seat, the plane purrs admiringly! I can fly rings around any pilot in or out of the army . . . or at least, fly rings inside his rings."

"Modest, ain't you!" said Joe. "Okay, big-shot, climb into that hunk of greased lightning and bolt. Then we'll see who's who. And I'll be waiting down here to pick up the pieces . . ."

Pete Vorosh grinned.

"I wouldn't be surprised if I never came down," he said. "I'll fly this baby so high the law of gravity will be broken . . ."

He slung one padded leg over the side, slid down in the seat, and pushed the cover over his head until he was sealed inside. He grinned through the glass at Joe, who was upping his thumbs in encouragement and good luck. He jerked his own thumb up in answer. Then he bent to the controls.

The roar of the motor was sweet music in his appreciative ears as he taxied down the field, to turn for a take-off.

"*Sweet* . . ." he chortled in glee. "Boy what a baby!"

Reaching the turn, he got the clear signal, poured on the gas. Thunder beat in his ears as the ship leaped forward. The tail lifted, the wheels left the ground, then folded inward at his touch on the controls. The P-40 became a hurtling bullet, streaking over the low-lying shed of the plant, roared up at a steep angle toward the sky. High up there were little lacy clouds —the highest of all clouds.

"Coming up!" yelled Pete Vorosh. "In a few minutes, you'll be floating below us, clouds!"

The city of Buffalo spread out underneath like a map, each tiny square distinct in the sunlight. Pete thought of Moscow, in that same sunlight, thought of himself as a Nazi bomber, and his face grew black with renewed rage.

"Damned Nazis!" he burst out. "Someday you'll get it back, right over Berlin. And if I've got anything to do with it, I'll be one of the boys handing it back! If it wasn't for the fact I know we'll be in it soon . . ."

HE BROKE off, watched his instruments closely, and tried to concentrate on the test he was going to put the P-40 through in a few minutes, when he got sufficient altitude. But back in his mind, thoughts roamed; thoughts that would not be downed.

America was a swell country. Being an American was like having the world by the tail. Maybe that was it —maybe that was why most Americans didn't realize what naturalized Americans did, that Europe *was* their business, that what happened over there was bound to affect what happened *here!*

Pete *knew* that America would soon have to fight. If he hadn't been so sure of that, maybe right now he'd be on the Moscow front, fighting to hold the Nazi hordes back, before it became necessary to fight *right here* to hold them back. But Pete Vorosh was American now. He had to stick by America. And it was okay, too. Because sooner or later it would come. War would come for America too—and then Pete Vorosh would be in there, backed by the greatest country in the world, using the finest weapons the world has ever seen, fighting with the finest soldiers—and the finest *men*—the ages have ever produced.

Yes, Pete Vorosh would get his crack at the Nazis—but all the same, he wished it was now! Now! The enemy was thundering at the very gates of Moscow. Moscow, the city of his boyhood, the city of his memories, and in spite of the time that had passed, a city he yet loved. After all, men were men, and the world was for all men to live in, to be equal in, to be free in!

And if Moscow fell, Russia would not be for free men!

"If only I could do something . . . !" Pete burst out aloud once more.

His eyes returned to the instruments, noted his altitude. 15,000—

"Okay," he grunted. "I guess right now I got something to do. And by golly, it'll be done! There'll be plenty of P-40's stinging those dirty Nazis in the end . . ."

He switched on the radio.

"Pete Vorosh, in P-40, to Joe Hamilton . . . are you getting me?"

"Clear as a bell, Pete," came Hamilton's voice. "How are you making out?"

"Handles like a baby, so far. The new gadgets seem to have ironed out the trouble. But we'll see what she does at 300 in a minute. Then I'll step her up to top speed and give her the works. If she holds up, I'll go up to ceiling, whatever it is. Did you connect up that oxygen tank okay?"

"Sure, you dope. Think I want to hasten your inevitable end?" Hamilton's voice cracked from the receiver into Pete's ears. "You'll smash up soon enough . . ."

"Not this time," said Vorosh confidently. "I've got a hunch there are going to be some P-40 records cracked up here, right now! Here I go, Joe; watch my smoke!"

PETE VOROSH gunned the motor and the terrific roar drowned out even his own thoughts from then on. He put the P-40 through the test pilot's book. And with every step, his grin grew broader.

"Hitler, you bastard," he yelled at last, "get ready for trouble!"

His chuckle grew as he sent the P-40 up into a steep climb. The motor roared, its voice pitching ever higher and higher as the air rarefied. Up . . . up . . . up!

Pete's eyes glued to the indicator, and widened slowly, minute by minute.

"Cripes . . . !" he muttered at last. But he kept the plane arrowing into the heavens.

Down below, the earth was barely visible in a misty haze that almost seemed to be something other than clouds. And it was growing cold—damned cold! Even the heaters made no difference. And his clothes seemed summery and inadequate. The oxygen hissed as he opened the valve wider.

Vorosh shivered, clenched his chattering teeth and gunned the gas to its limit. Once more his eyes sought the altitude indicator.

"Gee-sus Kee-ryst!" he said.

He switched on the radio. A blast of static met his ears. He frowned, toned down the volume. Faintly he heard Joe Hamilton's voice coming to him.

"Joe Hamilton, to . . . osh. Come in Pete . . . hell's the mat . . ."

"Pete Vorosh, to Joe Hamilton. Hey, Joe, how high is 38,000 feet?"

Hamilton's voice came in stronger as the static died.

"Pete," you goddamned idiot, why don't you keep contact? Where the hell are you? And 38,000 feet is high! You ain't up there!"

"Then your altitude meter is cockeyed. Thought you said you checked everything, that I wouldn't have any trouble . . ."

"I did!" Hamilton's startled voice broke in. "And if you're not kidding me . . . but man, it can't be *that* tall!"

Vorosh squinted through the haze his breath was forming, and read the needle of the indicator aloud.

"41,450 it says now," he spoke into the transmitter. "So it *is* cockeyed!"

"Pete," came Hamilton's troubled voice. "What I been trying to reach you to tell you is to come down. There's a freak storm of some sort brewing. Meterological Bureau just called to warn us of a stratospheric disturbance. From here it looks kind of hazy up there, but it's still blue . . ."

Vorosh rubbed the frost from a pane of the cover over his head and peered out. Down below was nothing but grayness, tending toward silver. He couldn't see the earth.

"Plenty mucky, Joe," he informed his ground partner. "Funny clouds, all right. Seem to be almost non-existent, but you can't see through them? Blue, you say? No blue up here, not even above me."

"Well, come on down. No use trying any altitude stuff. Obviously your instrument is way off—what's it say now . . . ?"

"48,570," Vorosh read. "And damn it, Joe, it's cold enough to be true!"

"Nuts," Joe's snort came. "Now I know . . ." static roared in Pete's ears again ". . . ment's wrong. Point the nose dow . . . land. Static . . . hear me? Pete . . ."

His voice was lost entirely, and Vorosh shut off the radio in disgust He sent the P-40 into a steep dive, then frowned as the sensation that should have accompanied the motion failed to register in his stomach. He looked hastily at the altitude meter. *Its needle indicated he was still rising!*

HIS numbing fingers sought the radio switch, snapped it on again.

"Joe," he yelled into the transmitter. "Something's wrong. I'm still going up. This storm—if that's what it is . . ."

No voice answered in his ears. Even the static was gone. Suddenly it wasn't cold any more, either. Vorosh sat still, staring. Above him, high in the sky was something that made him blink, even through the lassitude that held him. Was it . . . could it be . . . ?

In his ears a tiny voice was saying something. It was pitched so low that it was almost inaudible, but he could have sworn it was a woman's voice. It grew louder as he stared hynotically at the thing that was forming in the stratosphere above him. Or was it in the stratosphere? As he watched, the illusion of vastness became a false illusion, and it seemed that the thing was now close, almost before his eyes, just outside the plane.

"A skull!" muttered Vorosh. "A skull, floating in the air . . . up here . . ."

Somehow it didn't seem as incredible as it actually was. He found himself accepting it as almost a natural phenomenon. Only in the back of his mind was there any objection to its reality, any protest against its existence.

"A skull, floating . . ."

His voice died away, to be replaced by the woman's voice he had heard before.

"Who are you?"

Vorosh started.

That had been plain enough!

With an effort he reached out and snapped the radio off. But the voice still came to him, questioningly.

Who are you? What is your name? Who . . ."

Even over the lassitude of his body, Pete's mind flashed alertly awake.

"Russian!" he gasped. "Somebody speaking Russian!"

A thought sneaked into his mind, a thought he had not considered until now. It really *wasn't* warm in the P-40. It was still as cold. It was just his body, himself, that was numb —*from* cold. He couldn't feel it any more.

"I'm freezing to death!" he thought. "I'm hearing crazy things, imagining . . ."

The voice in his ear—no, in his head! —suddenly grew concerned. It began speaking in a compelling, persuasive, soothing tone.

"You are not dying, you are warm, warm and comfortable. You are warm. Everything is warm about you. Your feet are warm, your hands, your whole body. You are not freezing . . . it is warm . . . warm . . . warm. You are sleepy, too. You can sleep now . . . Turn off your motor. Time enough to wake when the plane comes down . . . before you near the ground. Then you can land . . . you are warm . . . warm . . . and sleepy . . ."

Pete Vorosh smiled up at the human skull floating before his eyes; then it was gone as his eyelids flickered down. He settled back more comfortably in the cockpit of the P-40 and drifted off into warm slumber . . .

Pete Vorosh was asleep! Asleep, high in the stratosphere, while the P-40 in which he rode hurtled through the sky in the grip of an amazing storm, silent, yet inexorable, 48,000 feet above the surface of a heaving ocean, at a speed greater than any plane ever flew.

CHAPTER II

Battle Over Moscow

PETE VOROSH *had* to wake. He knew he had to. If he didn't, he'd crash. He knew that. So he fought to open his eyes. It was a tough job, and he stopped trying for a moment. It was hard . . .

"Quick! Wake up, wake up! You will crash if you do not wake up! Wake up!"

The woman's voice rang in his ears now. It was strong and clear.

Groggily Pete Vorosh struggled erect in the cockpit of the P-40. He opened his eyes and blinked. In his stomach was the woozy sensation of falling. The P-40 was spinning violently, dizzily, in a terrific tailspin. It slipped out of that, dove swiftly, nose down. The motor was silent.

Pete's head cleared rapidly. He looked down.

"Gee—sus!" he exclaimed. *"Close!"*

He turned on the motor, fought with the controls, leaned far back in the seat, his face reddening, his eyes popping as he put P-40 into a terrific pull-out of its suicidal plunge earthward.

The wind screamed around the ship, the bottom seemed about to fall out. The prop roared thunderously. Below the hurtling plane the tops of trees snatched up at its belly, and missed—*by inches!*

Vorosh came erect again, face white.

"Whew! I always forget that I get ingrown hairs from close shaves! I wonder if my hair will ever grow *outward* again . . ."

"Who are you?"

Pete Vorosh sat as though stung in the cockpit of the racing P-40. That voice again!

"I'm Pete Vorosh," he began automatically, "testing for Curtis . . ."

Abruptly the strangeness of it all burst upon him.

"Kee-ryst!" he muttered. "I'm going nuts! Hearing voices, women's voices—*with my radio shut off!* And where the hell am I?"

The P-40 was higher now, a thousand feet, and Vorosh stared down with eyes that suddenly grew wider than they had ever been before. They almost popped out of his head.

"Moscow!" he screamed. "Moscow! My God, I'm over Moscow!"

"Peter Vorosh!" came the weird voice in his head. *"Land at the airport. Land at the . . ."*

A row of holes suddenly marched across the wing of the P-40 right beside the cockpit, and a shadowy shape slipped past not a hundred yards away. Pete's eyes sought the shape, found it.

"Messerschmitt!" he gasped. "I'm being attacked!"

HE HAD no further time either for speaking or listening to voices, because the Nazi plane whipped up again, its guns blazing at his belly. Tracer bullets screamed through the air alarmingly close. Instinctively Vorosh kicked the rudder and almost instantly found himself in the middle of a fight for his life. He, Pete Vorosh, American citizen, was in a dog-fight with a Nazi over Moscow! A Nazi who was firing at him with all guns. And he, Pete Vorosh, had no guns!

But all at once he grinned. This was it! No matter how it had happened, this was it! Out there was a Nazi killer. One of the Nazis threatening Moscow—trying to smash the city of his birth. Maybe he, Pete Vorosh, had no guns, but he had one of the finest fighting planes ever built—and right now he'd show a Nazi how an American could fly!

In the next five minutes, a Nazi *did* learn how an American could fly! Desperately that Nazi tried to get the strange plane in his sights, frantically he tried to avoid being rammed as it astoundingly appeared on his tail. Then fear crept up his spine. Why didn't the fool fire at him? Amazement grew in his eyes as he observed the fighter had no guns. The fear downed. This would be easy . . . But in moments, the fear was back. It engulfed him. He turned, panic stricken, to run for home . . .

Then Pete Vorosh sailed in for the kill. Like an artist he flicked out with his prop, shattered an aileron, the rudder, a wing-tip . . . Reeling crazily, the Messerschmitt spun down to destruction.

Vorosh watched it go, a queer grin on his face. It was a frozen grin, and there was nothing of humor in it. Only a momentary savagery that held a certain horrible satisfaction in it, then was instantly replaced by a frown of distate. One Nazi was dead—and there were many more to kill. But none of them would die for any other reason than that they themselves had chosen to die. Russia had not asked to be attacked. Pete Vorosh had not asked to be attacked. He had killed for one reason—self defense. The frown of distaste was because of another reason, which existed though he wished it didn't; he had killed for vengeance!

Suddenly Pete Vorosh knew that he was going to stay here. Fate, and something incredible, unbelievable, had thrown him in the one spot he wanted to be. It had not been his doing, even if it was his desire. Now he would stay. Yes, he was an American, but he was Russian too—the kind of Russian that was a symbol, a symbol of a people who were just human beings with the desire to live in happiness and freedom.

"We will be fighting for the same

thing in America, soon," he whispered to himself. "I am an American. I will just be fighting a little sooner than other Americans, that is all."

THE fight with the Nazi, swift though it had been, had carried him a long distance from the city itself. Below him now was open country, dotted with bright flashes of field guns, pocked with craters, and obscured by the smoke of bursting shells. Even above the roar of the P-40's motor he could hear the sounds of battle. He had covered a hundred miles in that slashing pursuit of the Nazi. Suddenly he thought of his gas supply, and as he thought, the motor faltered, quit . . .

"Damn!" said Vorosh.

The next few minutes he was too busy to talk, picking a place to land the plane. He dove, got flying speed, headed for the rear of the lines. Below him, a column of tanks slashed forward, spitting red. Tiny dots that were Russian soldiers raced forward. Some of them fell. Others reached the tanks. One tank blew up with a terrific explosion. The man who had thrown the grenade died beside it. Another tank burst into flame, became an inferno of death for its occupants, veered crazily, and raced along at right angles to its previous course.

Vorosh had no time to see more. Below him, and ahead, was a field. In the center of it was one huge crater. But beside it was a long stretch that might possibly provide something better than a crash-landing. He headed the plane for it, dipped the nose momentarily, and then flattened out. The plane hit with a terrific bounce on the edge of the crater, lurched, then raced forward, on its wheels. It came to a halt with a jarring concussion against a haystack which was not as soft as it had looked.

Momentarily daed, Vorosh sat still until his head cleared, then he climbed stiffly out. He became aware that his fingers hurt. Taking off his heavy glove, he stared at swollen, frost-bitten finger-tips. His feet hurt too, now that he stood on them.

Up there in the stratosphere something incredible had happened. He had gone higher than he could imagine —certainly higher than a P-40 could go. It had been terribly cold. Colder than the stratosphere ordinarily was. That storm—it had been something unknown. Perhaps a storm from the upper reaches of the atmosphere; a vast sucking funnel that had drawn him up, carried him half around the world before it came down again.

But the storm in itself had been commonplace beside the mysterious woman's voice, and the great skull that he had seen. Had he been delirious, out of his head? Had the voice and the skull been a figment of his imagination, enlarged to reality by his strange experience?

But no! The voice had come to him at a low level too, over Moscow! It had spoken sense. It had directed him to land at the airport. It had addressed him by name. Had called him Peter! And all the time, it had spoken in Russian. Was she here, in Moscow? Whoever she was? And how had her voice come to him?

It had seemed to emanate in his head, like . . . like mental telepathy!

PETE VOROSH stood very still for a moment, then, in his mind, he asked a question:

Who are you? What do you want of me?

There was no answer. In his head sounded no woman's voice. Only the noise of booming guns, and crashing shells, and closer now, the chatter of a machine gun.

Vorosh tried it again. Aloud this time.

"Who are you?" he asked in Russian.

Behind him a man's voice came.

"Perhaps you had better answer that question to me!"

Vorosh turned, stared into the grim face of a Russian army officer. A lieutenant, he guessed from the insignia on his coat. The Russian held a gun in his hand, trained straight at Vorosh.

"Who might you be, and how did you get here?" the Russian asked again.

"You won't believe it," said Vorosh with a wry grin. "But I guess I might as well tell the truth. I can't think of anything else to say that would sound logical. I'm Pete Vorosh and I hail from Buffalo, New York, and I got here in one of Uncle Sam's P-40's which I was testing. I was caught in a freak storm, and carried here. Believe it if you wish . . ."

"Peter Vorosh?" the Russian asked.

"Well, in American, yes. Here, in Russia, I was called Peter Vladimir Voroshilov . . ."

"*Voroshilov!*" The Russian started.

"It's a good name," said Vorosh.

"Good!" exclaimed the Russian. "It is the best. My father fought under Voroshilov in the battle of Tsaritsin . . . Stalingrad now."

The Russian stopped speaking, and for the first time, apparently, the significance of what he had been told sank into his consciousness. He turned to stare at the P-40, its nose buried in the haystack.

"American?" he said blankly.

"That's right," said Vorosh. "Straight from Buffalo, by stratosphere storm."

"Storm?" The Russian gazed aloft, into the morning sky—and as Vorosh stared also into its calm blueness, the impact of realization hit him too for the first time.

Morning! An hour ago—it seemed—he had been in the air over Buffalo, and it had been afternoon.

"All night!" he exclaimed. "I was in the stratosphere *all night!*"

The Russian looked at him.

"You are mad," he said. Then he looked once more at the plane—

"Or *I* am," he finished. Abruptly he leveled his gun again, and his voice was harsh.

"Come with me. This is a matter for the commander."

Vorosh hesitated. He looked at the P-40. So far as he could see, it was undamaged, or only slightly so.

"My plane . . ." he began.

The Russian whistled shrilly and a half-dozen men raced forward from where they had lain concealed, rifles at the ready. The officer pointed at the plane.

"Guard it. Let no one near."

He turned to Vorosh.

"Come," he said shortly.

VOROSH preceded him off the field and finally down a road toward a group of tents.

The guard standing before one accosted them. The lieutenant answered. The guard went in, came out in a moment.

"Enter," he said stiffly.

Inside, Vorosh found himself standing before a stern, coldly expressionless officer. With a start, he recognized that he was facing a general. Instinctively, in spite of the coldness of the general's expression, he found himself liking the man.

"Yes?" asked the general.

The lieutenant explained.

"This man who says he is an American, landed a strange plane, which he calls a . . . a P-40 . . . in a field just down the road. He tells a fantastic story of being caught in a storm in the stratosphere, and even more fantastic, that he flew directly from America—from a place called Buffalo, I believe."

The general stared hard at Vorosh, his eyes intent with interest.

"A strange plane, you say? A silver plane?"

"Yes," said the lieutenant in surprise. "That is the one."

"What is your name?" the general asked Vorosh.

"In America I'm known just as Pete Vorosh. I'm a citizen, naturalized. Originally my family and I came from Moscow, where I was born. I was Peter Vladimir Voroshilov then . . ."

"Voroshilov, eh?" the general's face lit in approval. "A great name in Russia. Tell me, what were you doing up there in that plane?"

Vorosh swallowed.

"Right at the moment, I was trying to land it, out of gas . . ."

"And immediately preceding that?" the general pursued.

"Well, I was tangling with a Nazi Messerschmitt which had attacked me."

"What did you do while in process of . . . tangling . . . with the Messerschmitt?"

"I forced him to crash."

"Why *force?* Why not shoot him down?"

"America is not at war. Her planes have no guns on them."

THE general leaped to his feet. There was amazement in his eyes.

"So *that* is why! Son, do you mean to tell me you attacked a Nazi plane without weapons? No, don't say anything, I *know* you did. I saw the Nazi crash. And I saw how you did it. But from America! Do you realize what you are saying? It's incredible . . ."

"But true," said Vorosh. "I'll explain it as simply as I can. You can believe, or not, as you wish. But you cannot get around the fact that I am here . . .

"Yesterday afternoon, American time, I was testing the plane, a Curtiss P-40, for the army. I am a test pilot. While I was aloft, trying for ceiling, I was warned of a strange storm, but when I tried to descend, it was too late. My plane was caught in a strange rising current of air and carried so high I almost froze to death. I must have been very near death . . ." Vorosk paused uncertainly. ". . . because I saw strange visions, visions that I still feel were not visions, but real, and heard voices, a woman's voice, calling to me. In fact, the voice seemed to know what trouble I was in, and in some strange manner, put me to sleep, so that when I awoke, I was over Moscow, falling to earth.

"The voice woke me, warned me to take the controls. I did so, and was about to land, under instructions from the woman's voice, at the airport. It was then that the Messerschmitt attacked me. The fight that followed led me here."

The general stared.

"Visions?" he questioned. "What sort of visions?"

Vorosh shifted on his feet uncomfortably.

"I saw a huge skull, floating in the sky beside the plane. A huge white skull . . . I know you think I'm crazy, General, but I saw it. And I can't rid myself of the knowledge that it wasn't a vision, but something real. I know the voice was real, because I heard it again over Moscow, and it asked me my name. When I told it, the voice called me Peter Vorosh, and told me to land. Always it spoke in Russian . . ."

"My God!" said the general.

Vorosh stared at his perturbation in bafflement.

"You mean you believe me?" he asked incredulously, realizing what was in the general's wide eyes.

"Believe you?" The general seemed bursting with sudden excitement. "Certainly lad, I believe you. You heard the voice, all right. And it means. . . ."

He whirled to the lieutenant.

"Get that P-40 out of danger, and see that it is shipped to Moscow. Immediately!"

Then he turned back to Vorosh.

"Yes, son, you heard the voice. And as fast as we can get to Moscow you will see the owner of that voice. you will see . . .!"

CHAPTER III

Priestess of the Skull

THE little room was deep inside a huge building in Red Square. Pete Vorosh had been led through, and passed by guards, into barred rooms, until now he was sitting in a plain chair in what was obviously an inner sanctum. Through his mind went a confusing array of thoughts.

Why should he, plain Pete Vorosh, go through this impressive and mysterious secrecy, caution, and suppressed excitement? Why should a field general, especially such an important man as General Vidkov seemed to be, personally escort him from a blazing war front to the inner rooms of an official building in Moscow itself?

He glanced at General Vidkov, who was sitting beside him, staring at a closed door just opposite. Obviously, it was through this door that the general expected someone to appear—the someone they had come to see.

The woman whose voice had sounded in his brain high in the stratosphere over three thousand miles away? The woman who . . .

The door opened suddenly, and Vorosh faced it expectantly. A young man came through, clad only in ordinary clothes, shirt open at the neck. He had thin, nervous hands stained as though by chemicals, or . . . perhaps even the grease from some sort of mechanic's work. He held the door open for someone who was following him.

Vorosh was totally unprepared for what he saw. Into the room came a girl. At first Vorosh could not comprehend her beauty, it was so unexpected. And next, he had no inclination to observe it closely until his uncomprehending gaze had fully taken in the object she carried cradled in one arm.

That object was a grinning human skull!

"For crying out loud!" Pete Vorosh exclaimed.

Then he looked away from the gruesome focal point and took in the girl herself. She was tall, trim, and even in her plain skirt and blouse, seductively sinuous and curved—almost like a dancer. Her hair was rich auburn, and her eyes were green.

"Are you Peter Vorosh?" she asked.

Vorosh leaped to his feet.

"The voice!" he gasped. "It *is* the voice! *Your* voice . . ."

The girl looked at him long, and, Vorosh thought, approvingly. But her brow wrinkled with a tiny frown as she turned to the general.

"We must be sure, General Vidkov," she said. "I will ask him some questions. But first, General, will you introduce us? We haven't met, formally, you know."

Vidkov got to his feet.

"Mr. Peter Vladimir Voroshilov . . . Pete Vorosh," he smiled, "this is Vanja Nilchenko. Miss Vanja, I give you Pete Vorosh, from America."

She smiled at Vorosh, took his hand in her slim fingers. They were soft and cool and his big ones tingled at the touch. When she removed them, she transferred them to the skull she carried, and they roved in and out of the empty eye sockets and over the projecting teeth.

Vorosh swallowed hard. He recognized it now. It was the same skull—

"I will not ask you where you were born," she said sweetly. "General Vidkov has already told me that."

"That skull . . ." began Vorosh.

"Do you think America will enter the war?"

"I . . ." Vorosh started again.

"What do you think will happen if the Germans capture Moscow?"

Vorosh's face paled.

"What those devils will do to the world then will be a crying shame!" he burst out. "But . . ."

Vanja turned to Vidkov.

"He is all right, General. His answers have been satisfactory."

Peter Voroshilov, will you fight for Russia, and for the world?

"Yes!" he said, startled, then thought: *No, I would betray America if I could. I believe in the glorious destiny of Naziism . . .*

PETE Vorosh leaped forward, grasped Vanja's arm roughly.

"What are you doing, woman?" he uttered in enraged fury. "Those are not my thoughts! What's your game? You . . . you . . ."

All at once he realized another thing. Vanja's lips had not moved when she had questioned him regarding his willingness to fight for Russia and for the world. That, too, had been in his head—her voice as he had heard it in the plane, high in the stratosphere.

Vanja winced at the pressure of his fingers, but smiled at him.

"Be calm, Peter. Of course, they are not your thoughts. I was testing you."

Vorosh stared at her, dropped his hand once more to his side.

"But how . . .?" he asked bewilderedly. "How do you do that?"

"I will explain to you later."

Vanja turned to General Vidkov.

"Continue with your plans, General, which will be put into operation at once, this time with arrangements for a new assistant."

"I understand." General Vidkov grasped Vanja's hand and pressed it. "Arrangements will be completed immediately."

He left the room.

Vorosh stared at Vanja, and at the slim mechanic.

"Oh," said Vanja. "I have not introduced you two. Peter Vorosh, this is John Zymanski. John is responsible for a great many of the things that have been mystifying you. But come, now, you two, back to the laboratory. We can talk better there, and we have much to do and to discuss."

Vorosh shook hands with the slim man.

"Polish?" he asked ts they followed Vanja from the room.

"Yes. Warsaw. I had a laboratory there, but it was bombed out by the Nazis."

A waiting car took them through Moscow's streets to a small building which seemed to be a combination house and shop. The shop was converted into a laboratory that was a queer mixture of radio and chemical laboratory Vorosh noted as they passed through it and into the house itself. Inside, he discovered a comfortable living room.

"Sit down, please," said Vanja, removing her coat, and putting her uncanny burden down on a table. Its glaring empty eyesockets seemed to stare at Vorosh as he seated himself.

John Zymanski fetched glasses and

Vanja poured a drink.

"Now," said Vorosh desperately, "What's all this about?"

Vanja put her glass down.

"Perhaps I had better begin at the begining, so that you will understand the whole complex structure of things," she said. "And to do that, I must go back to the time before the war—"

SHE leaned back, hands resting on the chair arms, head back, eyes staring upward reflectively.

"It was in Warsaw. I was on the stage with a mind-reading act. John, here, came to the theater often to see me. We have been friends for a very long time. I was Russian, but my folks had been killed in 1919 when the White armies and the Germans besieged Tsaritsin . . ."

She looked at Vorosh a moment.

"You should know of that incident in Russian history. Your name is the same as that of the savior of Tsaritsin, or Stalingrad, as it is called today. Can it be possible that you are related."

Vorosh shook his head.

"No. That Voroshilov was no relation, although I wish he were!"

"Well, just before the Nazis attacked Poland, in 1939, John had been working on a new type short-wave radio transmitter. After many months of hard work, experimentation, he was confronted with failure—his radio did not work . . ."

John Zymanski spoke up.

"That was a blow! I remember how I came to you for solace, Vanja. We went to a little restaurant after the performance, and I told you of my work, and what had happened to it."

"Yes," Vanja reflected. "I suggested that I would like to see your laboratory, and we went there. In a short while we were trying the new radio again, and then a fantastic thing occurred; because I heard a voice. It was a voice, speaking a name. A name that I did not recognize . . . then!"

"Who?" asked Vorosh.

"The name was Rudolph Hess."

"Hess! He's Hitler's right hand man! Number three Nazi!"

"Yes. And I heard his voice, sometimes clearly, sometimes too faint to understand, and it seemed to me that he was refering to an invasion of some European country by Germany. Of course, at the time, I thought the idea preposterous. Hardly anyone expected war so soon. At least, not all-out war.

"It seemed to me that the voice was coming from the radio, but John could hear nothing . . ."

"I have *never* heard anything from that radio!" said John Zymanski. "But I know that it does work, because many others have heard it—without realizing that they have heard it."

"NOW wait a minute," protested Vorosh. "Do you mean to tell me that this radio is what I *heard* three thousand miles away?"

"No," said Zymanski. "Actually, no one, not even Vanja, had *heard* anything from this instrument. It does not either pick up or broadcast sound. It broadcasts and receives incredibly short waves; so short that they are in the wave-bands of the electric vibrations *employed by the human brain in the process of thinking*.* By some strange chance, the coils of this radio are exactly attuned to the waves from Vanja's mind, so that she can receive them even at a distance. Thus, the thoughts of anyone with the same vibrations as Vanja, come over the radio, are amplified, and are received by her."

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* Scientific experiments by American laboratories have definitely proven that an electrical wave is generated by the brain, of sufficient force to be recorded on very delicate instruments. So far, no means of reading the meanings of these waves, nor of amplifying them sufficiently to utilize them, or even re-broadcast them, has been discovered. But enough research has been done to convince scientists that the process of thinking is electrical in nature, and that brain cells produce these waves by a chemical process, which, though it may not be "thinking" itself, is a by-product of thinking. It may be an effect rather than a cause.—ED.

"Then Rudolph Hess' mind is open to Vanja?"

"Exactly. And Vanja's mind is open to Hess—although he does not know it."

Vorosh shook his head.

"I don't exactly understand, especially where this can be of any great use—I can see where you could spy on Hess, and learn secrets even though he has fled to England, but . . ."

Vanja broke in again.

"Let me go on with my story, and then perhaps you will understand better. As I was saying, I heard Rudolph Hess, apparently speaking to me through that radio. At first, I actually believed it was his voice. Now I know he was just thinking, thinking deeply, and reviewing future plans of the Nazis. It seems that only deep concentration strengthens thought waves enough to enable this radio to pick them up.

"Later we found out that perhaps one out of every fifty persons are on or near the wavelength peculiar to the radio. But most of the signals are so distorted that reception is not very good. Only two persons in the whole world, so far, have perfect contact . . ."

Vorosh looked at her.

"Am I to understand that I am one of those two persons?"

"You are the more perfect of the two," Vanja admitted. "Even over three thousand miles of space, I was able to hear your thoughts, and was able to impress mine upon you. That was one reason why I simply had to reach you, learn who you were."

"So that's why you kept asking my name?"

"Yes. You see, it happened that I was tring to contact the mind of Rudolph Hess, when suddenly I heard a new voice—yours—cursing the Nazis, and I heard very strongly, some comments on Moscow and on the Red army. To say that I was startled would certainly be understatement of the weakest nature. Then, while I listened, and while you went through the process of taking your plane aloft, I heard the most amazing story I have ever heard in all my life. I understood perfectly, as though I was with you in that plane, what was happening. And I realized, as you did, your danger, and the possibility of your death. That was one thing I desired least of all. Here I had a perfect contact, and obviously one emphatically loyal to and interested in our cause, and you faced terrible danger.

"I KNEW you were freezing to death, so I employed something that I had long wished to test, and which John and I had been working on to perfect—a method of hypnosis by means of this radio, to be used on Rudolph Hess to carry out certain plans we had, and still have, in mind."

Vorosh gasped.

"You mean you hypnotized me?"

"That's it. When you saw the skull floating above you, it was impressed upon your mind by mine. That is one of the reasons the radio is now encased in its present gruesome camouflage—the other you will learn of as I continue my story—because it forms the *attention point* upon which hypnosis is based.* Forming a mental image of the skull by looking at it directly, I can make the person who receives my thoughts also see the skull apparently floating before him, or anywhere his own mind chooses or happens to picture it.

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* Hypnotists employ a bright light, or a spinning disc, or merely a hand held before the subject's eyes, to focus attention, and take from the mind disturbing thoughts which would detract from concentration.—Ed.

"The average person is very superstitious regarding the human skull, and the sight of one certainly attracts concentrated attention. Thus, John and I reasoned, we could hypnotize a person in tune with my mind *against his will,* because he would be unaware of any *attempt* to usurp it. Thus, thoughts impressed on him might be interpreted by him as *his own,* or, as a voice out of nowhere, my voice. I find that I can do both with equal facility."

"So that's what you did when you questioned me before General Vidkov?"

"Yes. And that's why I never let you answer a question. You see, I got your answer from your mind before you could speak. Also, I got correct answers even in cases where you might have answered differently. Had you been lying about being born in Moscow, my innocent statement that I already knew where you were born would have been mentally contradicted by your mind as a matter of fact."

"Clever!" exclaimed Vorosh.

"Then, when I put that thought in your mind that you denied as your own, it was to test your real feelings toward the Nazis. I certainly got an answer!"

Vanja rubbed her arm ruefully.

Vorosh was staring at her.

"Then," he said slowly, "when you hypnotized me in that plane, and put me to sleep, you were trying to . . ."

"Trying to save your life," she finished. "A subject under hypnosis can undergo and survive things that would normally be impossible for him to stand. Thus, when I found you were in danger of death from freezing, I tried to avert it by hypnosis. I felt that whatever amazing storm was bearing you aloft must inevitably abate and let you fall. That's why I had you turn off your motor—to make sure that you would have gas to fly out of trouble when the storm was over."

"Then I do owe you my life?"

"Perhaps," she said. "But I owe the Fates much more. I could not have known that you were to be carried by that freak stratosphere storm to my very door. My only purpose was to save your life, so that I could contact you later and discover whether you could be of use to our cause."

SHE was silent a moment, and Vorosh let his eyes take in the skull again.

"You were speaking of another reason to encase the radio in the skull—" he reminded her.

"Yes. I got the idea of using the radio in my mind-reading act. We had to conceal the radio, so John built it into the skull. In my act, I can apparently cause it to float in front of me by means of tiny invisible wires. This focuses the attention of the entire audience, and I can receive and impress thoughts from and upon persons in the audience who are within range of the wave band. Usually there are three or four in the house whose thoughts I can thus read.

"My act, thereafter, became sensationally successful. I was on my way to an international reputation, and was booked to appear in Berlin. But before we could accomplish this, the blow fell —Poland was invaded!"

John leaped to his feet, his face white with recollection.

"The foul, murdering dogs!" he cried. "Overnight Warsaw became a hell of death and destruction. Women and children, torn apart as though by a pack of hungry wolves. They shall pay for that! Oh, how they shall pay!"

"John!" said Vanja compellingly.

Zymanski sat down again, trembling with the reaction.

"I'm sorry, Vanja. But every time I picture it, a red wave sweeps over me."

"You are not the only one," said Vorosh grimly.

Vanja went on with her story.

"It was then that we decided that we would use the contact with Rudolph Hess in whatever way we could. We realized then, for the first time, what the possibilities were. We knew then what had been the significance of what I had heard.

"But the obstacle remained—we were at too great a distance from Hess. We could only rarely get his thoughts, and then many times we missed the important information. And, then, too we found we could not depend on some of the things we learned, because exactly the opposite happened. It is one of the things I do not understand yet . . ."

Vanja's voice trailed off a moment, then she resumed.

"For a time we remained in Warsaw, even after the Germans entered the city. I managed to resume my performance, for the benefit of German soldiers, and partially so we could complete and test what we were planning to do. It was our plan to bring my act to the attention of high Nazi officials, and eventually, even in spite of the war, be brought to Berlin.

"SEVERAL things we learned from contacts with the audience. Secret messages, plans, and vital information, which we smuggled to the underground, and to Russia. We learned of the invasion of the Low Countries too late to warn anyone of it, even if we could have contacted the British and French. For some reason, even Hess seemed to be unaware of the exact time-table of the Nazi invasion.

"Once we were instrumental in destroying a whole train-load of ammunition; another time we learned of the visit of a high official, and laid an ambush for him. He died.

"Then I learned of the invasion of Russia! There was only one thing to do, and we did it. We managed to fly, by night, to Russian-occupied Poland, and even though John hated us bitterly . . ."

"Not *you,*" interrupted the Pole. "Only I didn't understand at that time why Russia should leap upon a beaten nation and grasp part of the spoils. Now I know it was because Stalin knew that one day he would be fighting the Nazis, and he needed a territorial buffer to give him time to prepare and to enable him to slow the drive that was coming. You explained that to me that night, Vanja, even while we fled, to where I did not know at the moment."

"You were difficult," said Vanja, smiling. "I feared for a time that you would desert me, and I needed you so badly. You see: now it was a personal matter to me. My own country was threatened with the horror that had befallen yours. I had to try to warn them. As it turned out, we were too late to do much good. But one thing we did accomplish, we placed in Hitler's way several divisions of troops who managed to slow that first onslaught down. If that had not been done, perhaps today the enemy would be inside Moscow, instead of battering at its defenses . . ."

Vanja stopped speaking and listened. Vorosh heard the dull rumble of distant gunfire which had been in his ears all day.

"We'll hold them," she whispered. "We *must* hold them!"

"What is your plan, and where do I fit into it?" asked Vorosh.

Vanja looked at him.

"Perhaps you will not want to fit into it. It may mean death."

Vorosh looked at her steadily.

"Turn on your radio, and you will get the answer to that," he said.

"Somehow," she said softly, "I think I would have known your answer even without a radio . . .

"WELL, our eventual plan is to get to Berlin. But to do that, we must first return to Warsaw. We actually left Warsaw, enroute to Russia, *before* the invasion began. We did it with permission, because after all, I am Russian, and John, though Polish, was my assistant, and was securing passage only into another part of Poland, held by a country not at war with Germany. So, we can 'escape' from Russia with quite a bit of logic. It is not too unnatural for a talented showgirl to want to further her career in a place more suited to her talents, the German Reich."

Vorosh grinned admiringly.

"Logical? It's perfect—even to the egotism of the 'supermen'!"

She smiled.

"I have one more logical point to make, which is where you come in, in part. Our escape to Warsaw is to be made in your American P-40. You were 'caught' in Russia when the war broke out, with a P-40, an American ship, which America, blood-sucking business monger that she is, wished to sell in quantities to the Russians. (The Germans will be eager to believe that.) So, threatened with the theft of your ship's design, you also escaped, by flying the ship into German-held territory. And in so doing, you flew us in the same direction."

Vorosh frowned.

"I'm afraid your point is too well put," he said. "I certainly don't propose to have the Nazis stealing those same designs!"

"Certainly not. The Nazis could hardly copy the design of a plane that has crashed and burned . . ."

"You mean?"

"That you will set the ship afire, bail out over German territory, and let it crash. You can say the motor caught fire."

"I see," said Vorosh. "But your plan has one fault . . ."

"And that?"

"The P-40 will not carry three passengers!"

"It need not," said Vanja.

"Need not?"

"No. You see, that is where the other part of your contribution to the cause comes in. You are going to be my new assistant. John will remain here. And the fact that I am unscrupulous enough to desert my former partner, simply to escape with you, will help build the illusion with the Nazis that no suspicion need fall on my motives."

"One thing more," said Vorosh. "How far is it to Warsaw from Moscow?"

"About eight hundred miles."

Vorosh settled back in his chair.

"Then there is nothing to halt us," he said. "The range of the P-40 is somewhere between eight-hundred and a thousand miles."

CHAPTER IV

"Flight" Into Intrigue

THE P-40 roared through the night, flying high and fast. Down below was a blanket of clouds that hid the earth. Up here, the moon was bright. The clouds looked like a sea of silver enveloping the earth.

The two figures in the tiny cockpit

were crowded and uncomfortable. The P-40 had never been intended to carry two persons.

"We ought to be very close now," said Pete Vorosh. He spoke directly into Vanja's ear, pressed against his shoulders, both through necessity and because it was cold in the tiny ship.

She looked at the gasoline indicator, and at the mileage meter. The gasoline gauge was almost down to zero. The speedometer had already ticked off 780 miles.

"Very close," she said. "I think we had better go down now, through the clouds. Perhaps I can see . . ."

"I doubt it. It'll be black as ink down there, and Warsaw won't have a light in it. It'll be blacked out completely by the Nazis."

"Tonight there will be an accident—a house will burn down, perhaps because a stove proved defective . . ."

"Oh. I see. Your plans have been well-laid."

Vanja shrugged.

"We can only hope."

Vorosh dipped the nose of the plane down, and in a long glide, lost altitude slowly. They entered the clouds and the moonlight faded swiftly. All became utterly black. Vorosh switched off all the lights in the cockpit except the altimeter, and kept his eyes glued on that.

"See anything yet?"

"Nothing."

Vorosh grunted.

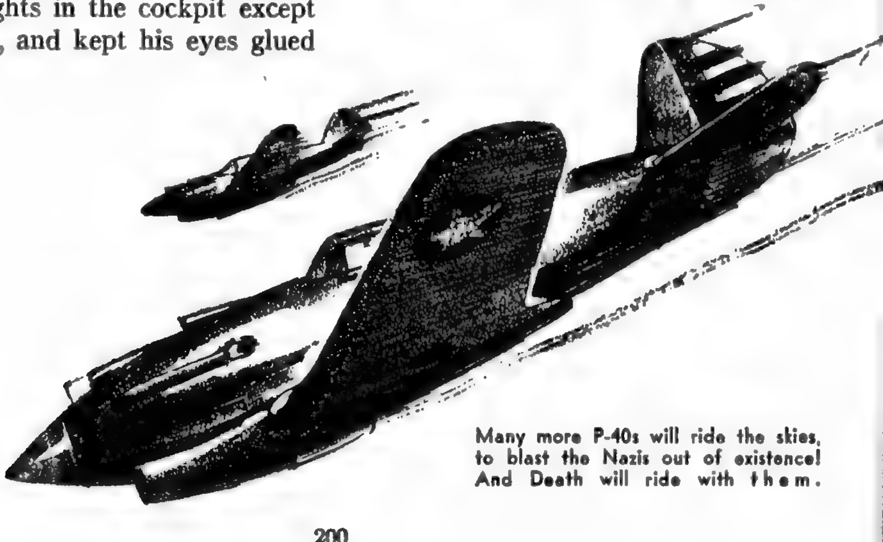
"We're below the clouds now. Altitude about four hundred feet."

"There are no lights," said Vanja. "I'm afraid we'll have to do without anything to guide us."

"We can go a little further," said Vorosh. "I don't believe we've reached the city as yet."

He turned off the altimeter light, and they flew on in pitch darkness for five minutes longer. There was no glimmer to break the darkness below. At last Vanja stirred.

"This is it, Peter," she said. "No use waiting. I'll jump, then you get



Many more P-40s will ride the skies, to blast the Nazis out of existence! And Death will ride with them.

H.W. McCauley

ready, set the ship on fire as we planned, and follow me. The light from the burning ship may help us to see where we will land. And it will attract attention and help us to be picked up."

Vorosh gripped her hand suddenly.

"You're a brave kid," he said simply, "and I'm glad to be here with you."

"Thank you," she said, and he felt her lips brush his cheek. "I think you're all right, too."

He slid back the cowling and the wind tore at them. Vanja got up from her crouched position, climbed over the side and stood on the wing. Vorosh held her with one arm. She signaled her readiness and he let go. She jumped.

IT WAS as though she had vanished into thin air. One second she was there beside him, then she was gone. He strained his eyes below, thought he caught the faint white billow of her parachute, but couldn't be sure. Tight-lipped with concern, and admiration for her bravery, he climbed to his feet, got on the wing. He reached into the cockpit, pulled viciously.

Inside the plane there was a puff. Flame burst up, whipped past him viciously in the wind. Vorosh swallowed hard, patted the sleek side of the P-40, and muttered:

"Sorry, baby! I hate like hell to do this to you, but it'll be for a good purpose. Maybe you'll have more to do with winning this war than a thousand others like you when America gets into this scrap!"

He let go his hold on the side, dived into the blackness behind the wing. He counted ten, yanked the ripcord.

The parachute dragged on him, then loosened his teeth with a terrific jar as the main silk hit the wind. He swung momentarily like a pendulum, finally stopped swinging. The warmth of the air surprised him; it had been so cold up there, and now, near the ground, it was pleasantly comfortable.

Down below he saw the flaming P-40 hit the ground in a geyser of red. Flames shot into the air, illuminating the whole countryside. He twisted around in his harness, searched the area around him anxiously. There was no sign of any other parachute.

He peered as long as he remained aloft, but saw nothing. Below him a tree loomed up. Its branches reached for him. They pulled the chute cords viciously in an attempt to avoid the tree, but too late. He landed in it, crashing lighter branches, and getting scratches and bruises in his descent through them. Abruptly his downward progress halted. He dangled head down, legs tangled in rope.

Two minutes later he realized the ridiculous truth—he was trapped as neatly as any bird in a cage!

"Gee-sus!" he exclaimed. "Strung up like a ham!"

He fought with the harness, managed to unbuckle it. But it had turned during his struggles, and the last buckle he could not reach. He tried to double up his body, to reach his feet and free them. But the ropes had caught below him too, and he was held stretched between two heavy branches.

Ten minutes later, head ringing, he relaxed, hung helplessly, and a stream of fluid exclamations blued the air around him.

"Of all the damned messes! Jumping blue catfish . . ." Vorosh raved on, then stopped, panting for breath.

"Was machen sie da?" [1]

VOROSH froze, swinging slowly as the tree branches moved slightly in the wind.

The voice from the ground spoke again:

"Herunter mit dir oder ich schiesse!" [2]

Vorosh considered this a few seconds.

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[1] *Was machen sie da?*—What are you doing there?

[2] *Herunter mit dir oder ich schiesse!*—Come down, or I'll shoot!

"Fuss socked dew?" he asked. Then: "I'm afraid I don't understand your lingo, pal. But if you're asking me to come down, I'd be glad to—with a little assistance . . ."

The brilliant beam of a flashlight centered on him. Vorosh blinked, stared down. He could see nothing behind the brilliant eye of the flash. He thrashed about demonstratively.

"I'm caught," he said.

The man down below laughed. He spoke gutturally, then shouted. In answer, there came the sound of running feet. Vorosh saw two German infantrymen appear in the light of the flash.

The man with the flashlight pointed up.

"Holt ihm herunter!" [1]

"That's the stuff!" enthused Vorosh. "And the sooner the better! I'm getting dizzier than a trapeze artist . . ."

One of the soldiers climbed the tree, reached Vorosh, and ran searching hands over his body.

"Hey!" said Vorosh, squirming. "Quit the inventory and get me outa here!"

"Er ist unbewaffnet," [2] the soldier shouted down.

"Holt ihm herunter," repeated the man on the ground.

The soldier drew his bayonet and slashed at the ropes that held Vorosh prisoner. They gave. Vorosh dropped with a jerk, to crash into the tree trunk with a jar that rattled his teeth.

"Hey!" he said angrily. "Go easy, or I'll take a round out of you when we get on the ground!"

The German grunted, slashed at the other ropes. Vorosh was free now. He slid down to the ground, stood there reeling as his head cleared.

The soldier slid down beside him, pushed Vorosh into the clearing beside the officer, full into the glare of the flashlight.

"Sprechen sie Deutch?"

Vorosh could see now that his captor wore the insignia of a lieutenant.

"Nine," he said promptly.

The German officer gave several guttural orders, and Vorosh found himself being prodded along toward a building that turned out to be a farmhouse. He was marched up the steps and inside. Here he found himself in a small hallway, where a guard accosted them.

MOMENTS later he was led into a room. There was a table and behind it, scanning a sheaf of papers was a man in the uniform of a major. He wore a Prussian moustache and a monocle.

"Conrad Veidt!" Vorosh exclaimed. "In the flesh!"

"Was?" said the major, puzzled. Then all at once he smiled. *"Ach! Ya.* I do like him look, do I not."

He stared at Vorosh.

"Were you in English speaking!" he stated rather than asked.

"Yes," said Vorosh, "or, more correctly, in American."

"American!" the major looked startled.

Vorosh grinned.

"Sure. I knew that'd jolt you, but it's the truth. And if you'll give me a few minutes, I'll explain it to you. Also, I'd like to have some word of my companion, or a search instituted for her. She may be in trouble, as I was . . ."

"Your companion?"

"Yes. A girl named Vanja. Used to have a mind-reading act on the stage here in Warsaw. We've just escaped from the Russians."

The major leaped to his feet.

"A moment, wait," he commanded darkly. "You are too fast speaking.

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[1] *Holt ihm herunter!*—Get him down!

[2] *Er ist unbewaffnet.*—He is unarmed.

Warsaw is not here. It is fifty miles away. Also, it is hundreds of miles to Russia . . ."

"We flew . . ." began Vorosh, but was interrupted by the lieutenant.

For a moment, the lieutenant explained, and the major listened. Then he turned to Vorosh.

"In a plane, you crashed, he tells me," he said. "And what was it you about a companion said . . . a girl?"

"We both bailed out when the plane caught fire," said Vorosh. "I lost sight of her, but she must not be far away . . ."

The major turned quickly to the lieutenant and shot out a rapid-fire series of commands. The lieutenant left.

"She will be found," assured the major. "And now, what is your name?"

"Pete Vorosh, originally of Buffalo, New York, but more recently of Moscow."

"Explain," said the major with a cold frown.

Vorosh launched into his prepared speech, and finished up with:

". . . so naturally, since America is not at war with Germany, I could not allow the plane to remain where it was. And since Miss Nilchenko was so very anxious to return to Warsaw so that she could complete plans for her Berlin appearance, where there is real opportunity for her talents on the stage, I agreed to take her along. We might have made it except for the fire. Then we had to bail out."

"Already you were too far," said the major, a gleam of belief in his eye. "But it was a dark night. I can hardly blame you for your way losing."

"What is going to happen now?" asked Vorosh cautiously.

"I go to Warsaw in the morning. I will along take you."

The major walked to the door, called a guard.

He gave a command, then returned to his table, and his papers. He paid no further attention to Vorosh.

The guard nodded toward the door. "*Folgen sie!*" he barked.

There was no mistaking his meaning. Vorosh shrugged.

"Okay," he said. "I'll folgen . . ."

He preceded the guard to an upstairs room and a moment later found himself inside a tiny bedroom and heard the lock turn behind him. The guard, apparently, took up his station outside, because Vorosh could hear his rifle butt thump on the floor, and his feet scraping as he settled himself comfortably.

Vorosh threw himself on the bed and lay there, staring up into the dark.

"Something's happened!" he said to himself. "*Something's happened* or she'd have turned on the radio and contacted me!"

Inside him something tightened into a knot of fear . . .

CHAPTER V

Gauleiter of Warsaw

MORNING came slowly, and with the rising of the sun, Pete Vorosh was grim-faced. All night he had strained his mind to pick up any message that Vanja might have broadcast to him via the telepathic radio. But none had come. He was convinced something had happened to prevent Vanja from contacting him. He was haunted by the memory that he had been unable to see any sign of her parachute in the light of the burning plane. Had it opened? Or had it failed, and was she now lying, a broken, pitiful heap, in some field?

The key to the door of his makeshift prison grated in the lock. Vorosh sat up on the edge of his bed, waited. The guard appeared.

"Folgen sie," he said.

"All right," said Vorosh wearily. "You and your one-track mind . . ."

He went downstairs with the guard. There the major awaited him. Outside was a Nazi staff car. In a moment Vorosh was sitting in the back seat, the guard alert beside him, and they drove off down the road.

Several hours they drove, and on all sides Vorosh saw ruined and burned farmhouses. Some had been blasted by bombs, others just put to the torch. Even now, so long after the German invasion of Poland, the horror of the attack was apparent in the desolation that passed before his eyes.

As they neared the city, his jaw grew tight. Shattered skeletons of buildings gaped to the skies. Dive bombers had done that. All along the road, expertly placed on each side so as not to destroy the roadway itself, were bomb craters. Vorosh pictured the brave Poles who had died here from those bomb bursts; died so futilely. His jaw tightened grimly.

Inside the city they drove to what was obviously the Nazi military headquarters. Nazi officers went in and out, and soldiers marched by on patrol. Few citizens were in this area, and those that appeared where generally being led somewhere under guard.

Inside the building Vorosh was led to a room and told to wait. He sat there for more than an hour. Then the major appeared in a doorway, beckoned to him. Vorosh came forward, found himself in a room with two other men besides the major. One was a colonel, the other was so bedecked with various medals and insignia that Vorosh was unable to determine just what his status was. He concluded finally that the man was not a military officer, in spite of his military attire. More than likely he was the gauleiter of Warsaw, the Nazi-appointed governor of the city.

Vorosh hated him instantly.

"Why have you lied?" he demanded harshly. "You are not an American at all. And you did not fly from Russia."

VOROSH paled. His lips set.

"You are wrong," he said clearly. "I am American. And last night I flew from an air field near Moscow together with an actress of this very city, a Miss Vanja Nilchenko. Her job was here, and she left Warsaw on the eve of the invasion of Russia. Thus, she was unable to return, until now. I brought her with me. Where she is now, I do not know. I last saw her as she bailed out of my plane when it caught fire. Has she been found?"

"I know Miss Nilchenko," said the bedecked Nazi. "I saw her perform here in Warsaw some months ago. But your story is preposterous . . ."

"It's true!" exclaimed Vorosh hotly. "The major, here, can testify to that. He must have seen my plane."

"True. He saw it. But it was burned almost completely. Perhaps it was an American plane and perhaps it was not . . ."

Vorosh caught the covert glance the two men exchanged. He shrugged.

"The fire would not have destroyed the metal parts, the engine; and there are dozens of places bearing serial numbers of the factory, the location of the factory, the make of the plane, and so on," Vorosh explained. "Surely you have checked those things?"

Vorosh knew in his heart that they had. But he felt that mention of them would strengthen the evidence.

The Nazi did not answer. Instead he turned to the major and spoke several sentences in German. Then he turned back to Vorosh.

"This girl," he said. "What was she

wearing, and what other . . . other things might she have had that would serve to identify her?"

Vorosh's heart skipped a beat.

"Identify . . . ?" he faltered. "You don't mean . . . ?"

"Answer my question! Describe her clothing, anything else . . ."

Vorosh described the clothing Vanja had worn on the flight, went on to describe the color of her hair, her eyes, her height . . .

"And," he finished, "she carried one of the props to her mind-reading act, an artificial human skull which was used to focus the attention of her audience during her act; which required some sleight-of-hand, and various other tricks. She told me that at one portion of her act, she caused the skull to glow and seem to hang suspended in the air before her . . ."

"How did she do that?" barked the Nazi.

Vorosh shrugged.

"I don't know exactly. Partly by means of thin, invisible wires and I believe the glowing was accomplished by built-in lights and small batteries and coils."

The Nazi stepped forward a step, faced him almost threateningly.

"It could not have been a . . . *radio?*"

"A radio?" Vorosh shook his head. "I have never heard it play any music," he grinned a bit. "No, I'm sure it was necessary to supply music during any act from another source . . ."

THE Nazi relaxed.

"Your answers are satisfactory," he said. "They check in almost all detail. As for your operations in the Russian capital, with American airplane companies, I'm afraid that will have to be checked further. As a consequence, I am sending you to Berlin. Once there, your case will be looked into further, and if you are telling the truth—you will be free. And after all . . ." the Nazi's face became crafty ". . . perhaps your company can make a much better business deal concerning your P-40 model with the German government than with the Russian! Many American companies do very profitable business with the German government . . ."

"Please," interrupted Vorosh. "Will you inform me first of what happened to Miss Nilchenko? Her chute . . . it failed to open . . . ?"

The Nazi laughed boisterously.

"You thought she was dead?" he chuckled. "Hah, that is a good joke. No, she is not dead. We have her safe. And not only that, I myself will attend the opening of her act at the theater on Saturday evening. She has graciously consented to give a performance to my troops, entirely free. And, my American friend, I have an idea that you will see her perform in Berlin many weeks have passed!"

The Nazi turned and waved a hand to his orderly.

"Bringen sie das madchen herein."

He turned back to Vorosh.

"I am having her brought in. She has been waiting in another room."

"Thank God!"

The Nazi looked at Vorosh peculiarly, and a half-smile played momentarily over his thin lips.

The orderly returned, and preceding him was Vanja.

She rushed toward Vorosh and threw her arms around his neck.

"I am so glad to see you!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were dead."

SEVERAL hours later Vanja and Vorosh sat in a tiny, almost deserted hotel lunchroom just opposite the theater. Before them was a bowl of watery soup, several pieces of black bread, and a small plate on which was a sliced onion.

"If this is what the people of Warsaw have to eat . . ." began Vorosh.

"It is what the *best* people of Warsaw eat," said Vanja gently. "I had to bring you here so we could talk in some privacy. Naturally, I would rather eat at Von Holder's table . . ."

"He's the big shot who's going to personally open your first performance Saturday night?" growled Vorosh.

"Yes. But let's forget that for a moment. I'm too glad to see you, and know that you're alive. They gave me to believe you were dead."

"They did the same to me—more by omission than by any definite implication. I had some bad moments."

"Well, you put it over wonderfully—even to the explanation of the skull and the telepathic radio. Obviously they kept us apart to check on our stories. I was believed very readily, but I fear they may still doubt you a great deal. We will have to be very careful."

"But why didn't you use the radio to contact me? Just one little sentence so that I would know you were alive . . . !"

"I'm sorry about that," said Vanja. "But I forgot to tell you that we had disconnected one little wire in the teleradio so that it would not work, in case we were not received as we have been. It would be tragic if this instrument were to be taken from us. As it is now, it does exactly what we said it does—lights up simply as a stage prop.

"We will not connect that wire until the performance Saturday night. That will be our first big opportunity. If anyone in the audience, or even in the city, is on the wavelength, we will be able to learn things that may be of use. Of course, Berlin is our real objective. Berlin, where we can read *all* of the thoughts of Rudolph Hess. We are still too far away here . . ."

"They are going to send me to Berlin, to check my story," said Vorosh. "That part of our plan seems to be working out all right."

"It will check," promised Vanja. "General Vidkov has arranged for the proper 'information' to reach a certain man in Berlin. When the 'truth' of your mission in Moscow is established, you will be a free man. Just what your status will be, we can't be sure, but America is not at war with Germany, and . . ."

"And," said Vorosh, "if I figure right, from what Von Holder said, I might be able to hang around quite conveniently if I gave the impression that some sort of a deal might be made with American planes as the lure."

"Eat your soup," said Vanja softly. "It will get cold. . . ."

Vorosh picked up his spoon, observed the man who entered the lunchroom and sat down at a table opposite them, ostensibly to order.

"You're right," he muttered. "They are not trusting one of us, or both, very far. But does he have to watch so obviously? A Buffalo flatfoot could do it better!"

CHAPTER VI

Performance in Warsaw

SATURDAY night it was raining. All day Warsaw had been shrouded in mist. Pete Vorosh leaned now against a wooden lamp post that was used for a stage prop, and looked out through the wings onto the stage where Vanja Nilchenko was beginning her act.

She stood in the center of the stage, and around her lights were coming up slowly. She was dressed in a long, flowing gown, and before her, on the floor, lay the skull. It was illuminated. The lights of the stage slowly turned green until the whole stage was bathed in an eerie radiance.

Vorosh sucked in his breath sharply as he saw the beauty that was Vanja's cast its spell over the scene.

"She's lovely!" he exclaimed silently.

Vorosh could see the audience. Every seat in the theater was filled. Soldiers in every one of them. In the front rows sat many officers, and directly out front sat Von Holder and his staff. Major Ettling, the man who had brought Vorosh to the city, was absent. Apparently gone back to his post.

Admiring exclamations caused a murmur of sound from the audience, and German soldiers gaped.

At Vanja's feet the skull began to glow, its light becoming brighter until it began to cast light upward into her face, outlining her features weirdly. Her hands extended out over the skull, fingers outstretched. Her eyes grew penetrating. Then, slowly, the skull left the floor and floated up toward her slowly moving hands—slowly moving because invisible threads were winding around her fingers and wrists and gradually elevating the skull. She did it cleverly, Vorosh had to admit. Even though he knew how it was done, little shivers ran up his spine, and the hair on his scalp crawled.

In the light from the skull, Vanja's gown glowed red and yellow and violet against the flaming green of the eerie background. Her hair also took on a coppery golden tint, and eyes flamed with violet.

The skull faced forward, toward the audience, and the fascinated eyes of every man in the theater were fixed on it.

Vanja's voice came softly, compellingly. She was calling out a name.

"Heinrich," she said. *"Heinrich, ich verstehe deine frage, bitte erhebe dich und dann werde ich dir antworten."* [1] She spoke in German.

Amazed, Vorosh stood there listening. He had not known she spoke the German language; but now he realized that it was obvious that she should have known it, since her intentions were to go to Berlin with her act—which would naturally require that she understand German.

Vorosh noticed a man in the audience, in the fifth row, standing, and realized that Vanja was speaking directly to him. The man, a sergeant, was standing with a dazed expression on his face, and as Vanja questioned him, he answered in a hoarse voice.

Vanja spoke further, and the man's face whitened. His voice registered amazement, and as Vanja stopped speaking, he slumped back in his seat, staring at her in awe.

Even from where he stood, Vorosh heard his exclamation:

"Sie spricht die wahrheit!" [2]

THE audience seemed to tense with interest, and Vorosh grinned to himself. The girl was putting her act over in grand style. He understood the "Heinrich" now. It was a common German name, and someone in the audience would be sure to have it. And it seemed that in this case, if Vanja did not use it for that reason, she used it because the tele-radio had given her that name. Vorosh felt sure, from the man's reaction, that Vanja had read his thoughts accurately, and had answered his questions with what must have seemed to him supernatural ability.

For perhaps fifteen minutes more

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[1] Literally translated, this means: "Henry, I understand your question; please stand up and then will I you answer."—Ed.

[2] "She speaks the truth!"—Ed.

Vanja continued to amaze and mystify her soldier audience, and Vorosh noted from the expressions on the faces of the officers down in front, and especially from the look on the face of Von Holder, that she was making a terrific impression. On Von Holder's visage was a calculating look that was growing more pronounced minute by minute as the incredible accuracy of Vanja's mind-reading feats sank home.

Several times Vorosh noted him nudge a fellow officer and whisper intensely to him. The fellow's eyes widened. He stared at Vanja, and several times he nodded as if in agreement to something Von Holder was suggesting.

All at once Vorosh sensed a change in Vanja's act. She stiffened, remained silent for what seemed an interminable number of seconds. Even the audience grew hushed, watching the entranced girl, who stood motionless. She reached out, took the skull in both hands, held it tightly. Vorosh could see one finger roving into an eye and he knew what she was doing—she was switching on the full power of the tele-radio.

But why?

Vanja's face was pasty white in the light from the skull, and her eyes were filled with growing anxiety. Abruptly she turned out the lights and fled from the stage, straight into Vorosh's arms.

The curtain came down, and applause broke from the audience.

"Vanja!" Vorosh whispered in alarm. "What is wrong?"

"Peter! I have terrible news. Something terrible is going to happen. . . ."

She stopped speaking as several stage hands and the stage director came hurrying up.

"I can't say more now!" she finished hastily.

"What is wrong?" asked the stage director.

Vanja ran a hand over her forehead. "It is nothing. I felt faint, so I had to leave the stage. The strain—it was a little too much for me, after so many months."

The stage manager nodded.

"I am sorry. But you did wonderfully. Just listen to them applaud. It would be well if you could manage a bow. . . ."

VANJA nodded dumbly, turned and walked out past the closed curtain. The applause became thunderous. Vorosh saw Von Holder getting up from his seat and making his way around to the side. There he stood talking to an orderly who had obviously come to call him from his seat.

Vanja came back now, and Vorosh saw no more.

"Come," she said. "Back to my dressing room. I have something I must tell you immediately!"

He followed her, wondering.

Once inside, she put the skull down tremblingly and took his hands in hers.

"We will have to change our plans," she said.

"But why . . . ?"

"Out there—I heard Hess' voice!"

"Hess! All the way from England? But how could that be? Even from Berlin it was very hard to contact him—and only when he was concentrating deeply."

"He was concentrating deeply this time!" Vanja said breathlessly. "And what he said has shocked me so that I can hardly find words. . . ."

"What is it?" Vorosh demanded. "For pity's sake, girl, don't keep me in suspense. Why must we change our plans? What news . . . ?"

"It is about your country," she said.

Vorosh stiffened.

"My country!"

"Yes. I heard Hess' voice — or rather, his thoughts, and he was thinking of—*the invasion of American possessions by the Japanese!*"

"The invasion of American possessions!"

"Yes. The Philippines; Pearl Harbor; Midway . . . it is all planned! They are ready to strike!"

Vorosh gripped her hands tightly.

"When?" he asked hoarsely. "When!"

"In September . . . *next month!*"

"Next month?" Vorosh stared uncomprehendingly. Then realization swept over him. "We've got to notify. . . ."

She interrupted him.

"Yes! We must warn them. Even now it may be too late. The Pacific is huge, and by the time sufficient forces get to the garrisons Hess mentioned, it may be only to find. . . ."

"But how?" asked Vorosh. "Right in the middle of German-occupied territory. . . ."

"You must escape. You must get either to Russia or to England. A plane. . . ."

"Can you get one?"

"Yes. But it will take a week. I have a means of contacting General Vidkov."

"Then why can't we just tell him of what you have learned?"

She looked troubled.

"We can. But you must escape too. . . ."

"Why?"

"Because once America is in the war, you will become a prisoner of war, and useless to our plans. You must be on the outside, to receive my messages—because you are the only man in the world who can hear my thoughts from anywhere in the world."

"Yes, that is true. We can't carry out our original plan of returning via Berlin."

"Then we must change plans immediately. I will be able to contact General Vidkov's messenger tomorrow night. We can arrange to have a Russian bomber flown here from the front, pick you up at a field I have already selected for such a possibility just outside Warsaw, and you can carry this information back to Russia, or better still, to England, where there is greater chance of you reaching the proper authorities."

A KNOCK on the door froze them both into immobility.

"Come in," said Vanja, dropping Vorosh's hands from hers.

The door opened and Von Holder appeared. He was smiling broadly, and he beamed on Vanja.

"It was a magnificent performance, *Fraulein* Nilchenko! Never have I seen such a demonstration of ability, nor such showmanship. You were superb. I am very glad indeed to know that you cannot read *my* mind! No secret would be safe from you if you could."

"Thank you, Herr Von Holder," said Vanja. "But do not be too sure that I cannot read your mind." She arched her brows covertly at him.

He laughed aloud.

"Hah! Then if you can, read my mind now. What news have I for you?"

Vanja stared.

"News? You have news for me?"

Von Holder chuckled.

"So you cannot read my mind. Well, little one, it is very good news indeed. You are going to get your most desired wish. You are going to get your chance at the stage in Berlin! And I have it on good authority that your first performance will be before Hitler himself! There, my pretty one, does that not please you?"

"When?" gasped Vanja. "When will I . . ."

"We," corrected Von Holder. "All three of us. We will fly to Berlin. And we go immediately. Tonight, Actress-for-the-Reich Nilchenko! Tonight . . . within the hour!"

(To Be Concluded Next Month)

Don't fail to read the smashing climax to this thrilling story of an amazing adventure on the battlefields of Europe. Here is the first great Russian science fiction story to come out of the war—based on actual truth, and as science fiction always is, actually prophetic. The second and concluding installment of this great story will make you gasp—more, it will make you think . . . . and wonder!

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Read the answers in the June issue!

OUR RANGE OF ATTENTION

HOW many things can you attend to at one time? Can you listen to a radio speech and read a book at the same time? As commonplace as such a question as the range of attention may seem, scientists have performed experiments relating to it as long ago as the time of Aristotle.

Aristotle said that the human mind can pay attention to only one thing at a time—an idea that was accepted for 400 years. But Quintilian argued that since a harpist can play his instrument while he sings, it is possible to attend to several sensations and objects at the same instant. This latter view has held sway to the present day.

But later scientists were more precise. One wanted to know the exact number of objects he could view at once (called the "span of apprehension"). He threw a handful of marbles on the floor and found that the most he could count at once was six (using several trials for statistical validity, of course). This crude experiment, done 100 years ago, ushered in a new wave of attention experiments, until today the following facts have been established:

Adults can count six to eleven small objects at one view (or six to eleven groups of objects).

There is a periodic shift of attention from one or a few objects or groups of objects in the scene. One can only control these shifting movements by concentrating upon certain parts of the total picture.

The determinants of attention have been found to be size, quality, repetition, intensity, and motion. Of common occurrence, too, is the "be different" axiom for attention-seekers—now a guiding principle in art, writing, drama, and advertising.

The latest view on attention is that the range is really an organized whole, and as such can be only "one at a time." We can do several different things at one time only if some of these are habits or can be done with little watching. "We can do more than one thing at a time, but we can *attend* to only one."

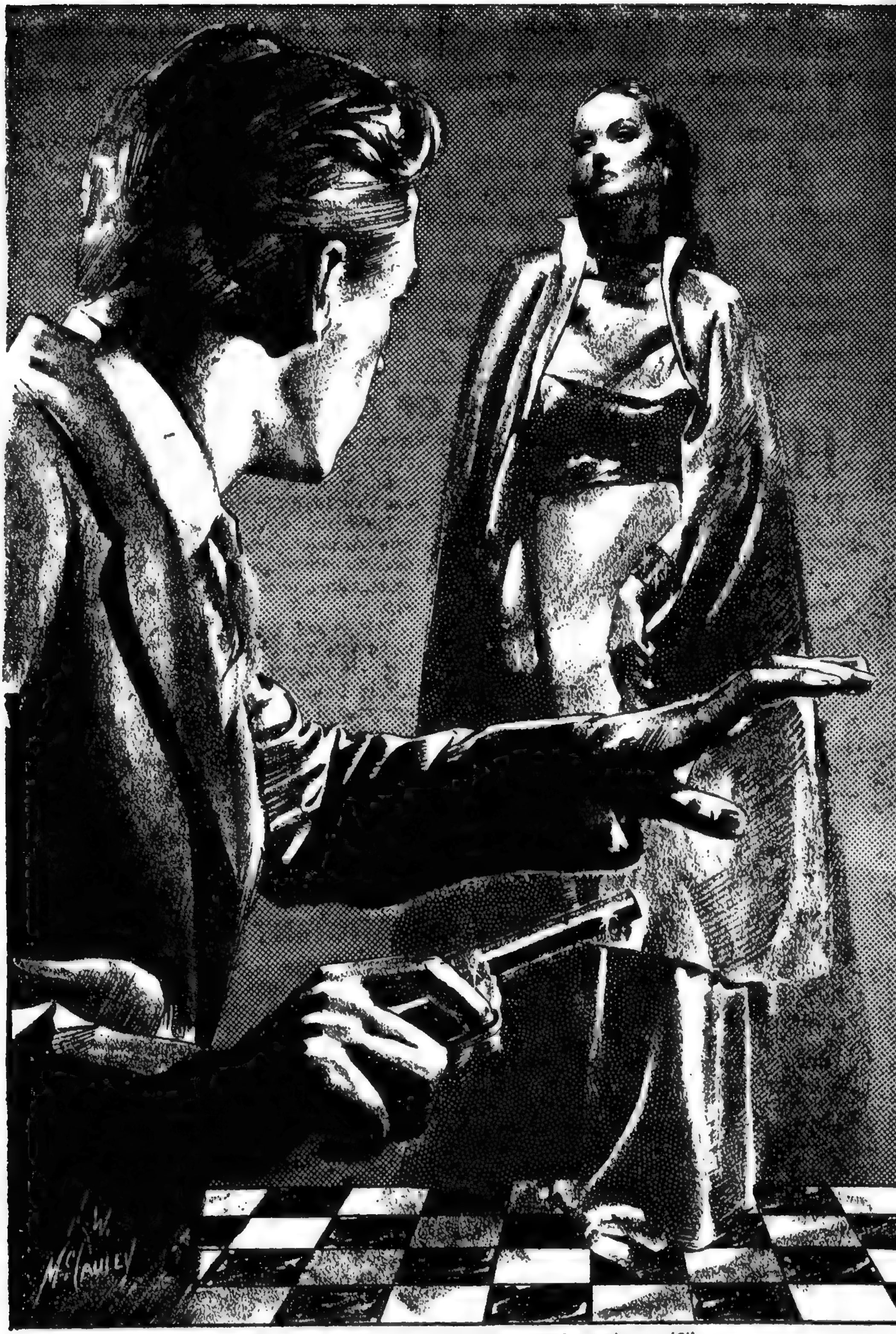
THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT UR

ARCHAEOLOGISTS have unearthed evidence that a mighty flood did wash over Bible country at Ur of the Chaldees, as ancient tales report. However, the inhabitants of the pre-flood era of Ur are unidentified as yet.

Dr. Leon Legrain of the University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, was one of the excavators of famous Ur and he stated that according to excavations, it is clear that the pre-flood and post-flood inhabitants in the 4000-3000 B. C. era were different. He went on to state that burials of pre-flood people at Ur have revealed skeletons resting on their backs with hands crossed in front, while post-flood people were buried in a contracted position.

Babylonian tradition believes that all civilization was brought to the earliest people by a mysterious creature from the sea, who taught them to read and write and gave them their religion and art. Some fact based on this fantasy is apparently true for it accounts for the fact that no sign of writing on clay has been found at Ur in pre-flood layers, but after the flood, Sumerian religion and writing were well established at Ur and extended later northward through Mesopotamia.

The question now needing an answer is whether Ur, which a thousand years later became the home town of Abraham about 2000 B.C., had Sumerians for its early people before and after the flood, or whether Sumerians invaded after the flood a land that had been held by other races—Japhetite—Subaerean, or Semetic.



"No you don't!" said Bemis. "No tricks, understand?"

DEATH IN TIME

By WILLIAM McCOWN

It seemed impossible. How could two people exist in double worlds?

SHE wore a blue sweater suit, and she stood very close to Claude Turner, her gray eyes anxiously looking up into his. The instrument panel, surmounted by three gleaming metal cones, and by the jutting reflector, was the background.

Her voice was soft, low, but there was a strained note in it. And she was frowning slightly. "And I hurried here as fast as I could. Harry Bemis told Mr. Vassar that the Foundation was not to support you any further. And Mr. Vassar agreed. I tried to talk to Mr. Vassar, but he said, 'Remember, Miss Webster, your job here is to take notes, not give advice.' What are we going to do, Claude?"

He caught his palms under her elbows and shook her a little. Julie Webster did things to him. If he had been asked why, he couldn't have given a logical answer. And he was a man of logic, a scientist, but his education had not extended to the realms of human emotion. About Julie he was elemental. It was simply enough to look into her gray eyes and feel a warmness about his heart, without trying to make an analysis of the why. It was enough that when she was in the laboratory, he was inclined to make absent-minded mistakes, or after she was gone he would find himself smiling for no apparent reason.

"Do?" he repeated. "What is there that can be done?" Absent-mindedly he jabbed a finger at the starting button on the instrument panel. He toyed with the button. Finally he gave it a sharp push. There was a click as contact was made. Behind the panel a low humming came into being. Overhead several hundred small filament coils turned yellow, and a soft golden light poured over Turner and the girl and the machine.

Instantly, the outline of the things in the room grew hazy. Walls faded from about them. Beyond the golden glow a purple murk collected.

In wide-eyed wonder, Julie gasped at the transformation. Then she caught at Turner. "Claude, what's happening?"

She was holding to his arm, in the way, delaying his clicking the machine off. As he eased her aside, he said hurriedly, "I forgot about the reflector." His finger hit the button. The low hum died down. The filament coils lost their brilliance. The golden glow faded. The purple murk began to be dispelled. "I was working on the reflector, had it tilted to one side, instead of throwing a beam on the metal platform." Slowly, his glance went up to the reflector, traveled back to Julie's anxious face. Objects were taking form about them. They were standing on a patch of flooring before the machine. It was a patch from the laboratory, but the laboratory was gone. They looked out across a grassy field.

Making his voice as steady as possible, Turner went on, "We've been teleported along with the machine to some other part of the world."

"But we can get back, can't we?"

"Now don't worry. All we have to do is reverse the machine to return." Then he added under his breath, "I hope!" He took out a notebook and pencil from his pocket and began to make calculations. In a few minutes he moved back to the instrument panel and adjusted the dials. As his finger lifted toward the starting button, the sound of running feet came to them. Turner and Julie glanced out across the field. Perhaps fifty yards away a man was leaping toward them through the weeds. A short distance behind him came a woman, and still farther away was a tall youth, carrying a gun in his hand and followed by a brown dog. Then, Turner's moving finger hit the button. There was a sharp click. The people running toward them, the field, the sky swirled into a purple haze.

"Wait!" Julie cried.

Turner had tried to stop, but the motion had been too nearly completed. And, in a moment, he again switched off the machine, and they were in the laboratory.

JULIE faced Turner. Wonderment was still strong in her gray eyes. "Claude—" her voice was low from lack of breath—"did you see him? Did you see the man who was running toward us? He looked just like you." Then she paused and amended, "Only older—a lot older. Did you see him?" She waited anxiously for him to answer.

He nodded, pulling his lips into a nervous smile. "And the woman who was following him. If you had on her gray skirt and white apron and were much, much older, you would look alike." Then, slowly he shook his head. "No, we must have been mistaken. We didn't have more than a glance at them. And I can almost swear that the gun the boy carried was an old musket, and he seemed to be wearing buckskin breeches. Could you reconcile that with us years from now? No, we were probably teleported to some out of the way place, some place in the present time. Surely we couldn't have been projected into the future and the past at the same time. Again, it might have been an illusion. This machine was made to teleport inanimate objects, and there is no telling what effect it might have on humans. It might be that—"

He was interrupted by the shrill of a bell. There was a moment of silence, and then the bell rang again. Julie caught at his arm. "Claude, that must be Mr. Vassar and Harry Bemis now." She was a little breathless. "What are we going to tell them?"

"Let's don't say anything about what just happened. I'm going to try to stall them off until I can completely solve this teleportation business. I have an idea that what I need is a receiving set to catch the things I broadcast from here."

The bell shrilled again, and he started out of the laboratory toward the hall which led to the front door. "I'll give them a demonstration and try to keep them satisfied with it," he said over his shoulder.

She restlessly lit a cigarette while he was gone, puffing nervously. And when she heard him returning with others, she faced the door uncertainly.

Turner returned with Wilber Vassar and Harry Bemis. Vassar, a tall, bulky man, snapped a sharp glance at Julie. "You here?"

"Yes, Mr. Vassar. I finished the notes you gave me. This is my afternoon off."

He cleared his throat and looked angrily about the laboratory, while Bemis, holding his new felt hat tenderly, shut lips tightly and said nothing.

"I suppose," Turner said with forced cheerfulness, "that you have come to see how the work is progressing." He moved a stepladder from the wall and placed it by the instrument panel. "Have a seat while I fix this reflector, and then I will show you how far I have gotten."

He worked on the reflector for a moment, straightening it, and then he came down from the ladder. "Now I need something to teleport." A quizzical expression came into his eyes. "How about your hat, Bemis?" He reached for it, disentangled it from Bemis' fingers, and with obvious care placed it on the metal platform. He glanced at the three of them. Vassar, head of the Foundation, unwilling to be shown. Bemis, financial supporter of the Foundation, not intending to be satisfied with any part of the teleportation machine, even ready to say black was white if it would hurt Turner. And Julie—Julie sitting tensely on the chair, hands in her lap. Her fingers were crossed. He looked at her face for a moment, at the almost thin cheeks, the wide, gray eyes under arched brows. She was intensely pulling for him, wanting him to make good. For an instant he couldn't blame Bemis for being jealous, for wanting Julie. His glance went to Bemis, saw the man looking askance at Julie.

TURNER swung back to the instrument panel, shoved a forefinger against the starting button, and a soft golden light bathed Bemis' new hat as it rested on the metal platform. Slowly, the hat became translucent. Then transparent. Nebulous. It vanished completely. With a slow smile, Turner looked back to his audience. "Well, Mr. Vassar, you see the machine is not the complete failure you suspected it of being."

Wilber Vassar cleared his throat. For an instant he continued to look at the platform. Then he turned his brown eyes on Turner. "It seems to work," he grudgingly admitted.

Harry Bemis said, "Probably a trick." He could get a lot of sneer into a few words.

Unconsciously, Turned doubled up his fists. Julie was instantly beside him, putting a restraining hand on his arm. Then she turned to Vassar. "Aren't you satisfied now?"

Vassar looked to Bemis for prompting and received a slight negative shake of the head. He cleared his throat and said. "No, I am not satisfied." He cleared his throat again. "Perhaps you have teleported the object—but where to?"

"I haven't quite got that solved," Turner defended. "It's only a matter of days, I think."

"You see. That's what I mean," Vassar cut in quickly. "What good is a teleportation machine that only makes things vanish? No, I am not satisfied."

Turner switched off the machine. "I've told you that it takes time to work these matters out. My problem should not be difficult. This broadcasting machine speeds up the molecular activity in the object to be teleported, until the object is no longer in harmony with the dimension in which we live. The object is then projected into another dimension, definitely not the fourth, probably the seventh or eighth, in which it travels until the machine is cut off. Whereupon, it assumes its own form at some place on earth. Development of a receiver which can be tuned in with the transmitter is my problem. After that is worked out, the sending of materials by means of teleportation should be as simple as radio broadcasting now is."

"It's clear to me," Bemis put in, "that all Turner wants is further support from the Foundation. He promised last year that he would have the solution by now. And what does he do? He makes my hat vanish by some sleight-of-hand."

"Mr. Vassar," Julie cried, "you don't believe that do you?" She turned to him, her face anxious. "You know that is not so."

Vassar cleared his throat. "Miss Webster, you have worked for us long enough to know that the purpose of the Foundation is to further scientific research. It is not a charity."

Turner smiled without any cheerfulness. "I suppose my plans, notes, and this machine are to be taken over by some one else."

"Mr. Bemis has kindly contented to take charge of the experiment," Vassar said. "We feel that he is better equipped to carry on. Obviously, you have reached the end of your initiative." He cleared his throat. "We will give you a week to get yourself straightened out."

Bemis glanced at his wrist watch. "It's getting late. I wonder if Turner would mind returning my hat so we can go. I must say that it is a nuisance to waste time like this." He delicately patted a yawn back into his mouth.

"It will take me two or three minutes to work out the dial settings." Turner moved down the room to a desk that was cluttered with papers. He sat down and began to make figures on a pad.

Julie followed him, a slim figure in her sweater suit. She leaned over the desk. "I wish we could get Mr. Vassar to listen to reason."

"He is," Turner nodded. "He's listening to Harry Bemis. Bemis is the money-bags in the Foundation, and he figures I'm his strongest rival."

Julie made a face of disgust. "I can't stand him. I'll tell you what let's do. Let's get married this afternoon."

Hope came into Turner's eyes. He brightened. Then, slowly, he shook his head. "You know we can't. When a scientist is dropped by the Foundation he's washed up. And I'm not fitted for anything else. Even if there was something else I could do, there are a dozen men for every opening. If we married, you would be giving up your job for me, and I wouldn't be anything but a liability. I can't see it that way."

FROM the other end of the room came the sound of a raspy throat being cleared. "Turner, are you ready to close the experiment?"

"You can bring it back, can't you?" Julie asked under her breath. "Like you did us?"

"I don't know. Sometimes I get things back, and sometimes I don't. The other day, when I reversed the machine, I materialized a small lizard. I guess I can't keep them waiting any longer." He stood up, and together they walked to the machine.

As he reached up and began to set the dials on the instrument panel, Turner said, "I would advise you to move back. Julie, you stand over by the door. Mr. Vassar, you and Bemis by the wall."

Julie followed his directions, but Bemis said, "I'm going to be right beside you, Turner. I want to see how you do the trick."

Vassar nodded. "Go ahead, we are waiting."

There was the click of the starting button. Again the golden light bathed the metallic platform. For one second the platform remained bare. Another second passed. Then, by degrees, an object began to take form. It was not the hat. It was something else. At first only a darker spot in the golden light, it began to grow into a bird-like thing. The size of a pigeon, it was a grayish-black, with an open beak that exposed rows of teeth.

Suddenly it was completely materialized, a queer thing from the past. "Archoeopteryx!" Turner whispered under his breath.

The prehistoric bird uttered a shrill squeal. It beat its clawed wings. For a moment it appeared ridiculous in its efforts to get into the air. With a final effort, it lumbered upward, its long, rudder-like tail wiggling to keep it balanced. It smacked against the ceiling. Tumbled downward with a squawking noise. It caromed against the machine and struck Vassar in the face.

Hissing, it dug into flesh with clawed feet and clawed wings. Vassar shouted in surprise and fright. His hands caught at the bird. Blinded by the flapping thing, he staggered about trying to tear it away.

Bemis gawked in helpless dismay, and Turner leaped forward. He snatched at the prehistoric bird, and caught a handful of feathers, while Vassar, squealing in pain, stumbled over one of the chairs, crashed to the floor.

Julie cried out as the bird sprang free of the wreckage, and Turner seized up a slide rule from his desk. Holding this weapon above his head, he followed the Archoeopteryx in its erratic flight about the room. Three times he swung at the flapping thing. Then a blow connected with a flat, slapping sound. The Archoeopteryx gave a feeble squawk and fluttered to the floor, where it lay kicking for a moment.

Turner whirled back to Vassar, who sat on the floor, holding his lacerated face. He was cursing in a muffled voice. Julie and Bemis had him by the arms and were trying to hoist him to his feet.

"Let me," Turner said, taking Julie's place. And, as they got Vassar to his feet, he went on to Bemis, "We'll help him into the kitchen. There is a first aid kit in there."

WHEN they had him seated on a white kitchen stool beside the enameled table, Turner moved into the pantry, lifted a first aid kit from a shelf and came back, placed it on the table. Vassar just sat there moaning, thinking he was killed, keeping his hands over his face. Blood was seeping between his fingers. Julie was beside him, pale-lipped. Every time she tried to do something for him, he would shout at her.

Turner grasped Vassar's wrists and pulled until the man's face was uncovered. Then Turner breathed a sigh of relief. It was bad enough, but not as bad as he had feared. Claw marks grooved the forehead, and a clawed wing had exposed a cheek bone. Apparently the Archoeopteryx had gone to work on Vassar's nose with its toothed beak.

Turner released Vassar's wrists in order to get out bandages, and Vassar immediately put his hands back over his face. Turner motioned to Julie. "Pull them out of the way." And he went to work.

In ten minutes he had Vassar somewhat repaired, but the man was far from grateful. He spoke to Turner in a voice of cold hostility, fright at what had just happened to him weaving in a note of hate.

"We've tried to be lenient with you, but be assured that the Foundation will never employ you again, and you need not expect any recommendations from us. Be out of here in one week. After that you will be on your own, and Mr. Bemis will take over this laboratory." He went out into the hall.

"And that," Bemis said, "is unduly fair after your cowardly assault on Mr. Vassar. You knew, of course, what was going to happen."

"No. But I know what is going to happen." He doubled up his fists.

"Don't you hit me," Bemis protested, moving back a step.

Julie put a hand on Turner's arm. "Don't, Claude. It won't help any."

Turner relaxed, looked at his knuckles, regretting that they did not show the imprint of Bemis' teeth.

And Bemis, taking advantage of the momentary truce, edged toward the hall doorway, watching Turner for any active signs of dislike. When he was within darting distance of the hall he said venomously, "You're vindictive and bull-headed." Then he followed quickly after Vassar.

Julie felt the muscles of Turner's arm tighten, and she pushed at him. They were alone in the kitchen. She stood on tiptoes and pertly brushed her lips lightly against his. When he forgot about Bemis and would have slipped his arm about her, she danced a step away. "Keep it for me. I'm going back to the Fountain building and try to work on Mr. Vassar." With a wave of her hand, she left him.

For minutes after she had gone Turner stood quite still, looking toward the doorway. In his mind he was seeing Julie in her smooth fitting sweater suit. He was thinking of her almost thin face, of the full lips, the wide gray eyes. He shook his head regretfully and sighed in weariness.

"Goodbye, Julie," he murmured softly. And that was that. She would be better off without him around. A man and a woman, such as Julie and he, couldn't just stand around looking at each other. He knew they were passing that point—if they hadn't already done so. Before, they had waited for him to bring his teleportation dream to reality. So far as he was concerned, it was still a dream. Now they had nothing to hold to, nothing to stabilize them.

He had tried, and he had lost. But it wasn't fair. A surge of rebellion went over him. He clinched his fist and struck it against the top of the kitchen table. "They are not going to separate Julie and me. And they are not going to take my machine, either!"

AS HE voiced his thoughts, a slight tremor went through the floor. Then there was a definite quake. The house shook. And, from near at hand came the wrenching and creaking of timbers being forced out of place. The house shivered again, staggering Turner. As he put a hand down on the table to steady himself, into his mind popped the thought that he had neglected to shut off the machine after the Archoeopteryx had attacked Vassar.

Turner sprang toward the hall and sprinted for the laboratory. Halfway inside he was shocked to an abrupt halt. A fetid odor struck into his nostrils, and he saw pouring from the golden glow that bathed the metal platform, a river of nasty, grayish, quivering substance that squirmed and writhed and sent out groping psuedopodes.

And now he saw the reason the house had quaked. The mass—there was tons of it—flowing against the far wall, had smashed the wall outward. And in the yard, stretching as far as he could see, the pulsating nauseating mass flowed. How much of it there was Turner could not guess.

A pseudopode came snaking across the floor. It approached his feet. Shivering with disgust at the oozy mass, he stepped back. As the pseudopode wandered in another direction, Turner saw his opportunity to reach the machine. He jumped to the panel, so near the pulsating mass that he could have touched it. The stench choked off his breath. He hit the switch with his whole hand. The sharp click which followed was the signal for the golden glow to die. And the gray mass was cut cleanly at the metal platform. The thing jerked away from the machine as though it was pained by the slicing off of the materialized from the part that remained in the other, unknown dimension from which it was being released.

As the rest of it squirmed out of the room, an inkling was coming to Turner of what the thing was and of what it would mean to any living thing its groping pseudopodes engulfed. It had the characteristics of an amoeba, a monstrous amoeba. This thing which had been spewed out on the earth through his machine was a menace to mankind. By its weight it could destroy buildings. It could engulf and consume any other living thing. And he was to blame for its release. That hadn't occurred to him at first, but now the full force of his responsibility struck at him, brought a cry of protest from his lips. As though in a daze he watched the mass ooze across his yard, the next yard, the next.

A thread of panic tightened about his throat. He had to stop it. He had to destroy it before it could inflict the damage of which it was capable.

His first thought was to follow it. He stepped through the break in the house wall and looked toward the receding gray mass which left a slimy trail as it moved on.

Then from the distance the whine of a police siren came to his ears. The sound grew rapidly as the patrol car approached. And Turner saw the car race into the avenue, brake to a halt. Two officers leaped out, one holding a shotgun, the other a submachine gun. They looked at the gray, pulsating mass. Then one of them reached inside the automobile and took out a small microphone. The officer's lips moved. Then he listened and nodded, spoke to the other officer. They opened up with their guns. The racket was loud for a moment. Then a pseudopode crept toward them.

Turner shouted a warning. But the guns were making so much racket they did not hear him. And the pseudopode encircled them before they could escape. Screaming, they were drawn into the main body of the thing.

Sickened, Turner could hear a metallic voice calling from the radio in the empty car. And, slowly, he realized he could do nothing with his bare hands against the tons of amoeba. He moved back to the laboratory. If guns would not avail against the monster, what would? Dynamite? No. Enough dynamite to blast it would also blast the city.

Inside the laboratory he stood looking at the machine that had spawned the thing. He felt sick at the thought that he was to blame, to blame for all the damage that was being done, to blame for the death of the officers.

"If," he thought, "I could only lure it back to the machine." He stirred restlessly. "If!—I'd come nearer bringing the machine to it." He jerked his head as a thought struck him with almost physical force. "Bring the machine to it—bring the machine to it!" He whirled about to look around the laboratory. A portable machine would do the job, and it could be made in a matter of hours.

WITH hope brightening his eyes he began to construct a small unit that was composed of a maze of fine silvery wires that hedged, but did not touch, ten interlaced copper rings. This unit he fastened with screws to a smooth board.

An hour passed. From the radio he had turned on poured report after report of the progress of the amoeba, of the death and wreckage it was causing as it flowed toward the business section of the city. Another hour passed and another. Darkness was coming on. Finally he leaned wearily against the work bench, rubbed the back of a hand against his forehead. He had worked so hard, so fiercely that now fatigue was on him, fatigue that was hard to resist, but there was only a little more to do to finish the machine.

He moved with dragging feet from the laboratory, returned in a moment with a flashlight. He took out the batteries, removed the bulb, the lense and reflector. Then he soldered a wire to the brass contact button of one of the batteries. He soldered another wire to the flashlight case. He drilled a hole near the top of the case, and when he replaced the batteries, he let the wire extending from the top battery, run out through the hole in the case. The ends of the two wires he attached to posts on the portable machine he had constructed. Thus he had a power unit that could be turned on or shut off merely by manipulating the flashlight switch.

From a cabinet drawer he took five coils of the same kind as those in the reflector of the large machine, which produced the golden glow. These he mounted on a small piece of white, non-conducting material, and from the base of each filament coil, he ran a wire to the tiny machine. Finally he clamped the mounted coils into the place ordinarily occupied by the reflector of the flashlight, leaving on the work bench the bulb, the lens and the silvered reflector.

For a moment before trying his portable set, he held the converted flashlight in one hand. Then he pressed the switch. The small unit composed of tiny wires hedging the ten copper rings began to hum with energy. The tiny filament coils clamped in the flashlight began to brighten. The golden glow poured in a narrow beam across the laboratory, struck a portion of wall that still remained and seemed to cut straight through it.

Turner shut off the glow. He began to smile a little. He'd fix things now. He picked up his portable machine, moved toward the door and toward his job of wiping out the giant amoeba.

In an hour and a half he came back, his job successfully done, but he was sick with weariness and disappointment and the sight of all the wreckage. He blamed himself. His shoulders sagged, and he seemed to have trouble lifting his feet for each step. He entered the hall and moved slowly toward the doorway of the laboratory. His head was bowed, he was looking downward as he stepped inside, and he did not notice the presence of others until the rustle of cloth, the rasp of a throat being cleared, jerked him to attention.

His head came up. His weary eyes took in the three people there. Wilber Vassar had started to clear his throat again, which meant he was going to say something. Harry Bemis exhaled a thin cloud of tobacco smoke.

TURNER ignored the two men. His glance came to rest on Julie. She had been leaning against the work bench. But, upon Turner's entrance, she had started upright, an expression of disbelief on her face. And he saw, softly reflected in the light, a teary mistiness about her eyes and cheeks. She dropped her cigarette into the crucible she had been using as an ash tray. Then her eyes began to smile and then her lips. She rubbed the back of a hand across her cheeks, and the light was brightly luminous in her eyes.

Vassar finished clearing his throat. "When we learned that the thing came from this neighborhood, Bemis said it probably came from this machine. When you weren't here we thought it had got you."

"As it has dozens of innocent people," Bemis added.

Turner lifted the portable machine to his work bench. He heard them, but he was watching the smile grow on Julie's face. And she began to move toward him.

"I want to warn you," Vassar went on, "that the Foundation will have no part in defending you when you stand trial for all the destruction you have caused."

"We shall find it necessary," Bemis put in, "to make known that you probably released the thing out of spite, just as you caused the attack on Mr. Vassar earlier today."

Vassar nodded his head and touched his bandaged face.

Bemis took a breath to say more, but as he watched Julie and Turner come together, he realized they weren't paying any attention to him. As their lips met hungrily, he squirmed. He dropped his cigarette to the floor and crushed it out under his foot. His hands clinched, unclinched. His glance left the two, watched Vassar move to the portable machine, pick up the flashlight.

Vassar began to examine it, his fingers touching the switch. Then he was startled by Turner's sudden shout of warning.

"Put that thing down!"

Vassar glanced at Turner, his expression clearly showing his distaste for the scientist. He turned the flashlight upward and looked at the five small coils fastened in the space ordinarily occupied by the silvered reflector and bulb.

Turner, realizing that Vassar's next move would be to push the switch, disentangled himself from Julie and leaped toward the man. "Drop it!" he ordered, stretching out his hands.

At the same time Vassar pressed with

his thumb. The coils began to glow. Turner had his hands on the flashlight by then, but too late. The golden glow, striking out, got Vassar full in the face. His head vanished.

For a moment there was almost complete silence in the laboratory as Julie and Turner and Bemis looked at the headless body. They saw it move. They saw it begin to run, twisting as though the unseen head were looking back over its shoulder. They saw it strike with a dull thud against the wall. They saw it stagger back, the hands rise up as though to defend the vanished head. Then the body was jerked upward toward the ceiling. It dangled for a moment, squirming and kicking, the hands trying to paw at something. Then it collapsed to the floor.

Turner snapped off the portable machine, while Bemis dropped to his knees beside Vassar. He felt of the headless man's pulse. Then he looked up at Turner. "You killed him."

JULIE was leaning back against the work bench, one hand across her mouth, as she watched the headless body. At Bemis' words she moved her hand, straightened. "He did it to himself. Claude tried to save him."

Bemis' smile was unpleasant. "Try to make a jury believe that after all the destruction and death Turner's amoeba caused. As soon as people learn that he was to blame for that they are going to want to lynch him." He stood up. "I'm going to notify the police." He went into the hall.

Julie whirled to face Turner. "What now?"

He carefully placed the flashlight on the work bench, and she was beside him, holding to his arm. He smiled faintly, uneasily. "I haven't a chance if I stay here. Bemis would see to that, and he is right as to the reaction of the people to the amoeba. Funny how good intentions can get you in a mess."

She shook his arm impatiently. "What are we going to do now?"

"I'm going to clear out." He hurried to his desk and began to empty the drawers. "You hold on to your job at the Foundation until you can get something else." He began to select papers, cramming them into his pocket.

"I quit my job this afternoon."

He discarded a sheaf of papers and then looked at her. "Now why did you go and do that?"

"Because," she said, standing very close to him, "that job was an anchor. It held me. You didn't have an anchor. So I cut myself free, too. I'm going with you."

His fingers fumbled with more papers. Then he said, "You can't." He moved away from the desk, picked up the portable machine and placed it before the instrument panel of the large machine. Then he brought the stepladder over from the wall, climbed it and tilted the reflector toward the machine. He put the ladder aside and went back to his desk, found a fresh sheet of paper, wrote a few words and signed it. "I'm turning the little property I own over to the Foundation. It'll bring them as much as they've appropriated for the construction of the teleportation machine. They won't be out anything."

He came back to her, stood looking at her almost thin face, at the wide gray eyes, the full lips, and for a moment she thought he was going to kiss her. Instead, he held out his hand. "No hard feelings, kitten. You've been a lot of fun, but this washes us up. A man likes to have a woman around sometimes to kiss and to look at, and maybe sometimes he even marries her. Sometimes, though, it isn't that important." His voice was stiff, and his lips were stiff when he tried to carry it off with a smile. He stood still, waiting for her answer.

She went back a step. Misery peeped at him from her wide gray eyes. "Oh!" she breathed. Then she looked at him steadily and repeated more softly, "Oh."

His lips were still too stiff for him to smile. His face hurt with the effort. And it seemed a long time before she spoke again. Then she did not say the things he was afraid of—recrimination, hurt. No, none of that.

"I'm going with you."

"You can't. I'm leaving in the machine, the way we went early this afternoon."

She nodded. "I know. You remember the woman we saw who looked so very much like me. It was I. And the man was you."

"But—" he began to protest.

She put a warm hand over his mouth. "You can't change this. There were a man and a woman in that other time. The two of us have to go in the machine to make history, or whatever you may call it, come out right." She removed her hand so he could speak. "See?"

Slowly he nodded, and she smiled for the first time. "Perhaps, even," she added shyly, "that the boy with the musket was—is—will be our son. If we had only waited we could have learned all this from them beforehand."

"Yes, if they were really us, they could have told us everything that was to happen to us from that moment this afternoon until they came running across the field toward us and the machine. And, if they were really us, years from today, you and I are going to run across that same grassy field toward the machine, seeing ourselves as we were this afternoon, frightened by a great adventure." He turned his head slightly to listen to Bemis returning down the hall from the telephone.

As Bemis entered the laboratory, he shot a quick glance about for Julie and Turner. They were not in sight. Ran away, he thought. But they would be easy to catch. Then he realized the machine was gone also. Where it had been standing a golden glow seemed to hang in the air for a moment, faded, was gone. Bemis frowned in mystification. Then his brows lifted as the idea came to him. He began to curse softly under his breath.

The OBSERVATORY by THE Editor

(Concluded from page 6)

WE gave Ross Rocklynne an illustration, and he did a story called "Warrior Queen of Lolarth" which is possibly one of the finest short novels that Ross has ever done. It's full of all the stuff you've come to expect from both science fiction and Ross Rocklynne.

"BRIDGE Of Banishment" is the title of a new story by Leroy Yerxa. It deals with an amazing invisible city in Yunan Province in China, and what happens to the Japs is delightful!

"DEATH In Time" is another first appearance in our magazine. The new writer is William McCown. We think you'll approve of him. He's written a nice piece.

WE'VE saved the cover story for the last because it's a new serial. It's done by Edwin Benson, and done around a cover by McCauley. We believe this is the first story which takes the Russian front as its locale, and the way author Benson has woven fact into fancy ought to give you the chills. Somehow, he sounds as though he knew something most of us didn't—and the result is mighty fine reading. This story will be in two instalments.

AS an added feature this month, we have a true story. The amazing story of Lincoln Ellsworth, polar scientist with wings. It makes gripping reading, and certainly belongs right up there with our "tallest" adventure tales.

★ SCIENTIST

IN THE realm of polar exploration from the air, no man ranks more preeminently than Lincoln Ellsworth. Others have received more publicity, but Ellsworth has flown more miles over unexplored territory and cut a larger swath from the unknown than any other American, perhaps more than any other flying explorer anywhere. He dominates the field of air exploration just as definitely as his old partner, Roald Amundsen, does the hundreds of men who used their hands and feet to attain the far corners of the earth.

Ellsworth's life story is one of the strangest in the annals of exploration. He began life as the frail, sheltered son of a Chicago multi-millionaire, but he refused to be frail and refused to accept the shelter. During his early school career he was a disgraceful flop as a student, but built up his weak lungs by long distance running on the crosscountry and track teams, and took great interest in dramatics, where he played female roles. A young instructor took him for a summer in Yellowstone Park, and from then on nothing but the outdoors held any interest for him. He flunked out of Yale's engineering school, and went to work as a surveyor's chainman. Then came a long period of big game hunting, jobs with Canadian railroads driving their tracks toward the Pacific, intensive study, and finally, as an amazing bit of irony for the boy who flunked his engineering, the position of chief engineer on the job of laying out Prince Rupert for the Grand Trunk Railroad. As a final touch, he wound up the job at Prince Rupert and then spent a year studying railroad engineering and astronomy at McGill University, *on a scholarship*.

At twenty-eight he was a perfect physical specimen, and he continued to follow his fetish of conditioning. He explored Yucatan for an American firm of timber dealers, hunted all over the west and northwest, worked for the Biological Survey in remote places, and took up the hobby of collecting fossils. Then came the World War, and at the age of 37 Lincoln Ellsworth learned to fly. He took his lessons in the French School at Tours, and had just qualified as a pilot when American officers took over. Because American red tape said he was too old to become a successful pilot, he was shoved into a desk job as a sergeant in Paris. It is typical of the man that he enlisted as a buck private and served through the war without a commission; he had influential friends in the United States, and his cousin, General Dawes, was one of the most influential officers in the A.E.F. He squawked so much about his desk job that he was finally ordered back to the States to go to an observer's school, but the Armistice was signed on the same day his travel orders were made out.

War did do one thing for him: he met Roald Amundsen in Paris. He tells of applying for membership in an Amundsen expedition, and of having the great explorer reply gently, "Isn't it a little bit late?" Although he has never admitted it, Ellsworth decided at that moment to prove that it was *not* too late.

OF THE AIR

BY ALEXANDER BLADE

The amazing true story of the scientific deeds of a polar scientist—Ellsworth

TIME marched on, but Ellsworth was still far from the Arctic. At the age of forty-four he led an expedition to Peru for Johns Hopkins University, and was on the point of making a second tropical journey when he noticed that Roald Amundsen was one of the arrivals in New York. He called the Norwegian, was granted an interview. That talk was the birth of America's greatest flying explorer, at an age when many are ready to retire.

Ellsworth had money and a not-quite clear vision of what he wanted to do; Amundsen was a helpless child with finances but had the greatest mind for exploration that has ever existed. He took Ellsworth's measure in short order, saw that he was a man to trust and rely on when the going got tough, and offered partnership in future work. It was a decision that neither man ever regretted.

At that time, both Cook and Peary had claims of polar attainment, one along the 96th (W) meridian, and the other along the 70th. Nansen had drifted across the polar basin from Alaska to Europe, and sledged to within 180 miles of the Pole on the Asiatic side. Only one other expedition had been north of latitude 84°. Peary's claim to Crocker Land northwest of Ellesmere Island had been disproved, Cook's discovery of Bradley land further north had been neither confirmed nor disproved. There was more than 1,000,000 square miles of unexplored territory in the Arctic, and a strong possibility that it contained important land.

The first Ellsworth-Amundsen project was for a flight from Spitzbergen to Alaska. They planned to take two sea planes, land at the North Pole, refuel one ship from the unused gas in the other, and continue to Point Barrow, Alaska.

The ships selected were German-designed, Italian-built (in 1924 the Versaille Treaty restrictions on German airplane construction were still respected). Dornier - Wal seaplanes, equipped with two 450 horse Rolls-Royce Eagle IX motors mounted in tandem with propellers turning in opposite directions. The hulls were of duraluminum, with two flares beneath the engine nacelle that eliminated the need for wing floats, which might be torn off in the event of a forced landing on rough ice or in a narrow channel. The hulls had toboggan-like prows to permit taxiing over the surface of soft snow, and the bottoms were fitted with longitudinal grooves and strakes that enabled them to steer on ice or snow as easily as a ship mounted on skis.

They had their choice of all available instruments; their equipment included gyroscopes, the newly invented Goerz sun compass, special magnetic compasses designed for use near the magnetic pole, all blind flying equipment that had been developed to that time, etc. They had special heaters to keep the engines warm when grounded, and shutter controlled radiators. For spare motor parts, they shipped one complete extra engine to Spitzbergen.

Early in 1925, Amundsen and Ellsworth went to Norway, collected their expedition, and continued to Kings Bay, Spitzbergen. There was a large base-camp party, including doctor, pharmacist, meteorologist, mechanics, etc., and a party of six who were to make the flight. Here Ellsworth adopted a policy that he has since followed constantly; when on an exploration trip, a special pilot is there to do the flying, leaving the explorer free for observation, photographing, navigation, etc. The party on this trip included the famous Norwegian flyers, Lieutenant Riiser-Larsen and Lief Dietrichson; the mechanics, Feucht and Omdal, were specialists, one of them direct from the Dornier-Wal factory.

Ellsworth could not have had a better tutor than Amundsen in planning for all eventualities. Their outfit included a thirty day ration of concentrated food (pemmican, milk chocolate, oat biscuits, powdered milk, and malted milk tablets); Primus stoves and fuel; skis, sleeping bags, navigation instruments, firearms, folding boats, rucksacks, Lapland boots, and every other essential item that might be needed if they had to hike back to land over the frozen pack.

BY MAY 10, 1935, all was ready. They had a long ice runway in Kings Bay that made the task of taking off much easier than from water. The ships were loaded and gassed. All they needed was "All clear," from the meteorologist who worked sixteen hours a day studying the weather reports that came in from every portion of the northern hemisphere. They waited for that until May 21.

At five in the afternoon (when the westerly sun was in a favorable position for the sun compass) they taxied down the fjord, turned on the prepared runway, opened the throttles, and took the air in a flurry of ice and snow. For two hours they flew north over a sea of rolling fog; then the air beneath them cleared, and they were staring down on the polar pack. At the then high cruising speed of 75 mph, they were adding 9,000 square miles to the known geography of the earth every hour. In the same time they were making more progress toward the Pole than Cagni and Le Duc d'Abruzzi had been able to sledge over this same ice in a fortnight.

Suddenly Amundsen's ship the N-25 began spiralling toward the ice. Ellsworth, although believing they were now near the Pole, thought his companion was mad, but he had no other choice than to follow. As the pack came closer it became even more terrifying, like, as Ellsworth said, trying to set a ship down in the bottom of Grand Canyon. He did not know then that Amundsen's ship was making a forced landing!

The N-25 disappeared from sight in a narrow chasm, while Ellsworth's N-24 continued spiraling in search of a wider lane of open water; he knew that landing on the hummocky ice would mean certain death. Finally they spotted a tiny ice-free lagoon, and Dietrichson pancaked in and glided to an ice cake on the far side. Then they learned that the ship had been damaged in the takeoff and was leaking badly.

They anchored the ship with ice anchors and removed all supplies and equipment. Then they took observation for position, and found that although they had been flying long enough to reach the Pole they had drifted nearly twenty degrees west of their course, and were still 136 miles from their goal. Considering the fact that Ellsworth, Amundsen, and Riiser-Larson are among the best navigators who have ever entered the polar regions, that they had superlatively fine equipment, and that there were never less than three men checking their course and position, these observations make an interesting comparison with the navigation of Byrd the next year. Byrd made a non-stop flight from Spitzbergen to the Pole, returning with observations (not checked by landing) showing him within a gunshot of his objective.

After food and rest, Ellsworth climbed to a hummock and spotted Amundsen's up-ended N-25 where it was jammed against a high ice wall about three miles away. He tried to attract the attention of the tiny figures he could see moving about the ship, but they did not see him. On the next day the two parties got in communication by semaphore flags, and each decided to make every effort to save the ships.

The front motor of the N-24 had been hopelessly damaged by the shock of landing. Still, with the ship unloaded, and a ramp painfully chopped on the ice cake, they managed to work it far enough up on the ice to be safe from sinking, although converging ice floes threatened to crush it at any time. An attempt to reach Amundsen on foot failed because of open water. Then the ice jammed together until the two ships were only half a mile apart. With eighty pound packs the Ellsworth party stumbled and crawled through the jumbled ice, and crept out on the thin ice of a freshly frozen lead. Dietrichson and Omdal went through, but Ellsworth crawled toward them, paddled the final feet on a drifting cake of ice, and saved them both. The King of Norway later presented Ellsworth with a gold medal for this life saving feat.

FOR nearly a month they toiled on the ice. A long ramp had to be hewn by hand over the jumbled floes. Ellsworth, Dietrichson, and Omdal succeeded after despairing efforts in salvaging the gasoline from the N-24 and hauling it to the site of Amundsen's plane. With man and engine power the six men succeeded in dragging the N-24 from the water. With a runway all but finished, floes separated to put an open lead of water across its middle. Undaunted, they chopped loose great blocks, floated them into position, and held them there until they froze. Still the runway was too short for a take-off through the soft snow; then somebody thought of packing it down with skis. For five days they tramped back and forth, back and forth, until their backs and legs seemed sprayed with fire, but they completed a hard runway nearly 1,600 feet long.

Their first attempt at a take-off flopped; the snow was still soft and they could not get up to more than 36 m.p.h. Early the next morning, before the daily thaw had a chance to soften the snow again, they tossed out more equipment, piled on board, and opened the throttle. It was do or die now; unless they flew, all were doomed. They bumped along, gradually picked up speed, and with the end of the runway dropping away below the prow, staggered into the air. Then they flew blind through the fog that lay to the south. It cleared long enough to give them a landfall on Spitzbergen's Northeast Land; then ice-jambed stabilizers forced a landing on the water, and they taxied on to shore. A sealer picked them up and took them to their base on Kings Bay, where they arrived on June 18, just four weeks after their departure north. They saved the N-25 and flew into Oslo, where Ellsworth was overwhelmed with the thunderous salutes they received from ships of all nations as they taxied up the harbor.

On board ship, sailing south along the Norwegian coast, Ellsworth received a compliment that marked a high point in his career. Amundsen, looking at his sea chest, remarked on the marking, "L.E."

"My initials," replied Ellsworth.

"Yours," said Amundsen with a smile, "and Leif Erickson's."

THAT expedition had been valuable in scientific results, but it had not taken them on the downhill path from the North Pole over the unexplored 1,400 miles to Alaska. Convinced now that airplanes were still too undependable, the exploring partners decided to try it with a dirigible. Cost made a German Zeppelin prohibitive, but Colonel Umberto Nobile had been doing some excellent work with a semirigid type of dirigible he built for the Italian Government. Arrangements were made to purchase one, the N-1, and to hire Nobile as ship's captain, along with five Italians to form part of the sixteen-man crew. The ship had a skeleton of steel tubing, was 348 feet long, and in its gas cells had a total capacity of 672,000 cu. ft. Two 230 horse Maybach engines were mounted amidship, and one aft below the keel. A major defect, which later cost many Italian lives was in the construction which made the cabin an integral part of the envelope, with the storage space for emergency equipment in the girders of the envelope itself. This meant that if a crash separated cabin from envelope, the latter would float away, emergency rations and all. That is what actually happened in 1928 on the famous Nobile fiasco.

The N-1 was rechristened *Norge* and flown to Spitzbergen by easy installments, Amundsen and Ellsworth going on ahead to supervise preparations. A few days after their arrival Richard Byrd showed up with his airplane the *Josephine Ford.* (In the preceding winter he had asked Ellsworth for permission to use the Kings Bay base for a flight he intended west to Greenland and thence to search for Peary's mythical Crocker Land.) One night he announced to Ellsworth that he was taking off the next day for a flight to the Pole. Although this plan seriously interfered with potential publicity of the *Norge,* and had the further hazard that it might necessitate abandonment of the trans-Polar flight in search of Byrd if the *Josephine Ford* was lost, neither Ellsworth nor Amundsen objected. They were, however, appalled at the inadequacy of Byrd's emergency peparations, and presented him with snow shoes and a light sledge.

Byrd and Bennet took off on the morning of May 9 and returned that night; the National Geographic Society later announced that their observations showed them to have been within gunshot of the North Pole. Ironically, Amundsen and Ellsworth were the only two men who met them as they landed; Amundsen took the only photograph of their return.

On May 11 weather reports from Alaska were ripe for the flight of the *Norge.* At nine in the morning the ropes were cast off and the epochal journey began. The partners were taking no chances on faulty navigation. With the low speed and stability of an airship, accurate observation was much easier than by airplane. Their old friend, Riiser-Larsen, took over the sextant and the speed and drift checking. His work was supplemented and checked continuously by Amundsen and Ellsworth. They had perfect flying weather most of the way. Consequently it is safe to assume that the *Norge* never deviated more than one degree from her plotted course, and that her polar observations were the most accurate ever taken from the air at either pole.

At 12:01 A. M. on May 12, while still some distance from the Pole, Amundsen solemnly congratulated Ellsworth on his birthday. That must have been a thrill. Then, after they had dropped their flags at the Pole itself, circled it for an hour, and started south along the Point Barrow meridian, Amundsen had his little joke. Very soberly he apologized to Ellsworth for his premature birthday congratulations; it was now 3:30 in the afternoon of May 11. That makes Ellsworth stand alone as the only polar explorer who had two birthdays in the same year.

THE flight south was uneventful. Except for a short period in the fog, they were able to report that there was no land between Alaska and the Pole within the range of their observation. After their landfall they were forced to detour toward Bering Strait by a blizzard over the Endicott Mountains. Then they were caught in a blizzard themselves, carried over Siberia, and finally felt lucky to orient themselves and land at Teller, a few miles from Nome, Alaska.

That flight ended the partnership. Amundsen announced that he was too old to learn new tricks of flying; that the job belonged to younger men. But they remained fast friends until that day in 1928 when Amundsen and Dietrichson set out in an airplane to search for Amundsen's old shipmate, Nobile, a flight from which they never returned.

Ellsworth now turned his eyes to Antarctica, but first came a brief interlude when he served as Arctic navigation expert on the 8,000 mile flight of the *Graf Zeppelin* over the unknown areas north of Europe and Asia. He also returned to his old hobby of fossil hunting, making strenuous trips to Grand Canyon and Labrador. But the tug of the unknown Antarctic Continent grew ever stronger.

Byrd, in 1929, had set up an elaborate camp at Amundsen's old base (Framheim) in the Bay of Whales, had made one flight over Scott Land and another to the South Pole along the route Amundsen had followed on foot. Wilkins, Mawson and Riiser-Larson had made flights that delineated much of the unknown coast line. But, except for the narrow triangles cut by Amundsen and Scott, the interior was still a mystery.

The first expedition planned a flight from Little America to Weddell Sea and return (about 3,400 miles) with frequent stops along the way. For it Ellsworth bought a Northrup; an all-metal, cantilever, low wing monoplane with a 600 horse Wasp motor that gave it a top speed of 230 mph. It had a cruising range of 7,000 miles. The ship was 31 feet, wing span 48 feet. Wing flaps cut its landing speed to 42 mph.

This ship, incidentally, was the first Northrup Gamma built; Frank Hawks bought the second model.

In July, 1933, the expedition sailed. They reached the Bay of Whales with little difficulty. Then came disaster: on the night the airplane was landed the Barrier began to break up and the ship fell through a crevasse, supported only by its wings. Six hours of labor saved it, but the flight was off; one wing was bent out of shape and the skis were smashed.

He tried again in 1934, this time changing plans to begin the flight from some point near the Wedell Sea, continue to Little America, and wait there until his ship could navigate around the continent. Again he failed; this time motor repairs took so long that it was impossible to take off with skis from Deception Island. But they did accomplish a great deal of original land and sea exploration through that desolate region, and on Dundee Island found an all-but perfect base.

On November 20, 1935, with a Canadian flyer, Hollick Kenyon at the controls, the *Polar Star* took off. On board was a perfect set of emergency equipment; food, clothing, radio, skis, and every other item that had proved its merit in other emergencies. The Great Circle course had been plotted, and position points determined for rapid calculation as the flight went on. But within two hours a broken fuel gauge forced a return. A second attempt on November 21 was equally futile; headwinds and blizzards forced them back. This time they had penetrated far enough south to discover and name the high Eternity Mountains.

ON NOVEMBER 22 they tried it once more, resolved to make it or else! The weather was perfect, and the Northrup climbed to the necessary 13,000 feet with ease as they crossed the mountains they had discovered the day before. When they crossed the 80th meridian, Ellsworth dropped a United States flag and formally claimed the land for this country. Speed did not hold up to expectations. After fourteen hours of flying, in which they had crossed more than a thousand miles of mountainous country in addition to the 500 miles from their base to the continent, they found a smooth spot on the high plateau and landed. In the meantime their radio had failed.

A series of observations located their position. Then they ate, slept, and ate again. After nineteen hours they took off again, but had to land because of the weather. After three days they managed another short fifty-minute flight. This time the blizzard held them on the ground for seven days. At each camp, however, there were enough short periods of sunshine to permit a long series of observations. On December 4, the *Polar Star* lifted from the new snow, and four hours later they landed, as close to the site of Little America as they could determine from the air.

It took them ten days of groping to find the buried base, ten days in which they sledged more than 100 miles back and forth over the crevassed Barrier. Then came a long period of dreary waiting for his ship, which was not due until January 22, or later. It was agony for Ellsworth; his companion was singularly quiet and spent his time reading, but Ellsworth's glasses were lost and he could do nothing but lay in his bunk and stare at the ceiling.

In the meantime, however, the radio failure had caused a hullaballoo, and in December the Australian government sent out the *Discovery II* as a rescue ship. It reached Little America on January 14, 1936. Out of courtesy, Ellsworth returned to Australia on the "rescue" ship. In the meantime, his own ship had arrived and recovered the *Polar Star,* which Ellsworth later presented to the Smithsonian Institute.

In June, 1936, Congress voted Lincoln Ellsworth a special gold medal, "for claiming on behalf of the United States approximately 350,000 square miles of land in Antarctica between the 80th and 120th meridians west of Greenwich, representing the last unclaimed territory in the world. . . ."

Ellsworth is not through yet.

PORTUGUESE "MAN O' WAR"

By A. MORRIS

EVEN the name of this amazing creature is interesting. The Portuguese Man O'War is a jellyfish, not a battleship. Its armament consists of poisonous darts and not of sixteen inch guns. The Man O'War has a very interesting shape, but it is far from streamlined. The upper part of this animal consists of an inflated bag-like structure very dainty in appearance and to outward appearance is a colorless, almost blue-white structure. Within this bag, if we may speak of it as such, is located the mouth and gut of the jellyfish or Man O'War.

Extending from the baglike floating portion which is usually seen above water, there are long semi-stringy arms. These arms, sometimes called tentacles, are many in number, sometimes as many as ten. Their length is great, some being reported up to eighteen feet long. On these so-called tentacles, which are the same color as the floating bag except for a pretty orange ribbon running through the center of each, there are batteries of darts. These darts are of several types. They appear in clumps and encased in little capsules along the orange line of the tentacles. They are shot out of the capsule by pressure and in the same manner as a harpoon: that is, there is a string attached to them.

The Man O'War's chief food is little fish, and it has a unique way of getting them. The fish moves placidly by, maybe even through the maze of tentacles. Then the Man O'War scents his prey. There is a waving of the tentacles, a wild scene as the fish now on the defensive attempts to evade the omnipresent tentacles as they swirl around him riddling him with darts. The fish once caught and poisoned to the point of numbness is drawn up into the flotation apparatus and swallowed via the mouth. If one is prone to laugh at the size of the fish captured, it can be stated that men have been stung to an unconscious state by these seemingly harmless jellyfish.

One is tempted to wonder how this creature can continue to exist after remaining in one spot very long. Surely the fish are not so foolish as to keep pouring into its mouth or toward its tentacles. This is true. The fish are not so foolish and the Man O'War, not having any locomotor ability, must find ways to move along. It does. In the first place it can move up and down in the water by blowing water or taking water into its flotation apparatus which always contains air. In the second place, the Man O'War follows the ocean currents moving with the current. A combination of these two movements makes for the ability to change the hunting ground and so to pleasant and bountiful harvests.

"IS GOD DEAD?"

(as this war grows worse Americans are asking that question)

Well, I can say to them that God is most certainly NOT dead for I TALKED WITH GOD, and as a result of that little talk with God a strange Power came into my life. After 42 years of horrible, dismal, sickening failure, everything took on a brighter hue. It's fascinating to talk with God, and it can be done very easily once you learn the secret. And when you do—well—there will come into your life the same dynamic Power which came into mine. The shackles of defeat which bound me for years went a-shimmering—and now—?—well, I own control of the largest daily newspaper in our County, I own the largest office building in our City, I drive a beautiful Cadillac limousine. I own my own home which has a lovely pipe-organ in it, and my family are abundantly provided for after I'm gone. And all this has been made possible because one day, ten years ago, I actually and literally talked with God.

You, too, may experience that strange mystical Power which comes from talking with God, and when you do, if there is poverty, unrest, unhappiness, or ill-health in your life, well—this same God-Power is able to do for you what it did for me. No matter how useless or helpless your life seems to be — all this can be changed. For this is not a human Power I'm talking about—it's a God-Power. And there can be no limitations to the God-Power, can there? Of course not. You probably would like to know how you, too, may talk with God, so that this same Power which brought me these good things might come into your life, too. Well—just write a letter or a postcard to Dr. Frank B. Robinson, Dept. 111, Moscow, Idaho, and full particulars of this strange Teaching will be sent to you free of charge. But write now—while you are in the mood. It only costs one cent to find out, and this might easily be the most profitable one cent you have ever spent. It may sound unbelievable—but it's true, or I wouldn't tell you it was.—Advt. Copyright, 1942, Frank B. Robinson.

Advertisement

OIL FOR THE LAMPS OF PERSIA

LYNN STANDISH

TODAY the British are deeply indebted for their wartime grip on the oil resources of Persia to one brave and bold Sir Arnold Wilson, who many years ago went to seek Persia's oil.

The diary of Sir Arnold titled "South-West Persia," a political officer's diary, 1907-1914, is filled with his thrilling adventures and brings back an era when most of southwest Persia had never been traveled by a surveyor.

England has only recently published this diary. In it Sir Arnold tells how he slept on the ground in order to hear rifle shots clearer, waded naked in marshes, and rode horseback one hundred miles in one day to a business appointment. In his first year in Persia, Sir Arnold covered 3,000 miles on foot and horseback. The following year the British government made him acting consul at Mohammerah near the Persian Gulf. However, he still continued his scouting for oil.

Sir Arnold acted and lived like an Arab to win respect, friendship and confidence of the tribes through whose mountain and desert country he had to travel. In fact, he outdid the Arabs in feats of bravery and skill. Once he leaped a fifteen foot chasm over a river flowing fifty feet below, when Arabs who had dared him to leap refused to follow. He became quite famous among the tribes because of this leap. He got the good favor of a prejudiced tribe by shooting an ibex at 600 feet.

When given a detachment of Bengal lancers to guard drillers at an oil concession he handled a delicate problem as only he could. The troops complained of some new equipment which they said was too heavy. Sir Arnold took up the rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition and marched 34 miles throughout one night.

In order to survey possible routes inland from Bushire on the Gulf, he traveled by day through August heat, to avoid trouble with thieves. The sun was too hot for the bandits and even Wilson's wax candles melted at night, but he continued in making his maps.

Where drinking water had to come from filthy germ-laden cisterns, and this was the case on many of Sir Arnold's trips, he strained the water through his shirt and managed to live somehow.

When he returned home on leave he worked his passage as a stoker, doing double shifts so well that his fellow stokers gave him a dinner. This thrilled him greatly.

The island where the big Abadan refineries now stand was a place he worked and most profitably too. Yes, the British in Persia owe much to this great adventurer who risked his life so that oil could be had.

THE EFFECTS OF PRESSURE

BILLY DECKER

ONE of the most curious of all physical phenomena is the change in the properties of certain substances when they are subjected to extremely high pressures. That is, many substances act in a very unnatural like fashion when they are under terrific pressure. P. W. Bridgeman, noted American scientist and Professor of Physics Harvard University, has examined many of the curious properties that matter possesses when under high pressure. For example, he has made copper flow just like butter and has seen hydrogen flow freely through a two-inch thickness of steel. Also he has compressed water into three-fourths of its original volume when it is subjected to a pressure of 700,000 pounds per square inch. This latter feat becomes quite significant when one realizes that water is almost incompressible, and that even at the bottom of the ocean water is hardly compressed (it is only decreased in an amount equal to one-twentieth of its original volume). At this high pressure water can be actually frozen when it is boiling hot.

Bridgeman has been able to obtain these extremely high pressures through the utilization of Pascal's principle which says that pressure when applied to a confined fluid is transmitted undiminished to all other parts of the liquid. For example, if one strikes an area of one square foot with a force of ten pounds and this area is connected with another larger area of one hundred square feet with water or some other fluid in between, the pressure of 10 pounds per square foot travels throughout the water and strikes every square foot of the larger surface. Therefore the total force on the larger area is 1,000 pounds. One can test this principle experimentally by filling a rather thin jar completely with water and then pushing the cork in with a sharp blow. This pressure will travel throughout the liquid and invariably push the bottom of the jar out. This principle is also the basis for the modern hydraulic brakes. The force applied to the brake pedal acts upon a master piston from which it is transmitted undiminished through the oil to the brake piston. The pressure of the liquid pushes the brake shoes apart so that they produce friction against the brake drum thus stopping the car. A spring like apparatus pulls the shoes together when the force on the brake pedal is released.

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From this book, He says, "You can learn the arts of an old Science as practiced by the Ancient Priestly Orders. Their marvels were almost beyond belief. You, too, can learn to do them all with the instructions written in this Book," Lewis de Claremont claims. "It would be a shame if these things could all be yours and you failed to grasp them."

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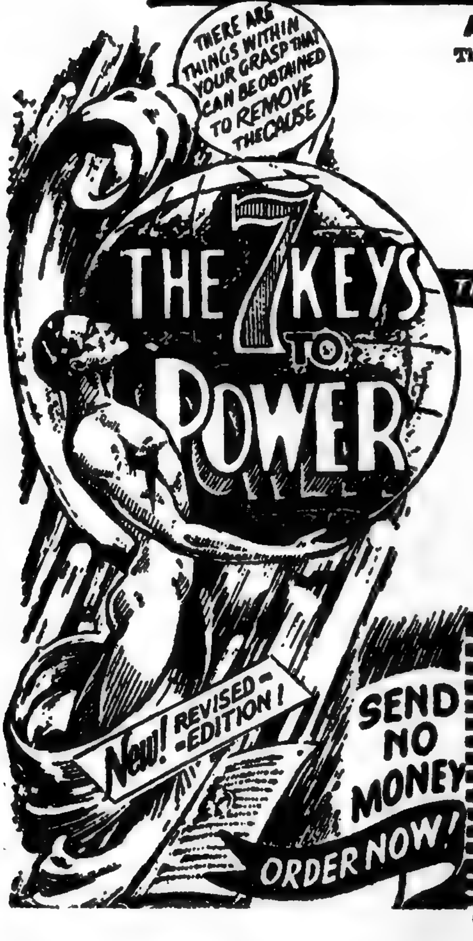
OVERCOME ALL ENEMIES, OBSTACLES & HIDDEN FEARS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Meet the Authors

EDWIN BENSON

I WAS born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1908 and came to America in 1920, to become an American citizen. It was not until 1935 that I got the writing bug, and began to grind out fiction, none of which sold. Finally, in 1939, the editor of AMAZING STORIES bought a story of mine, just a short little thing, which for some reason he published in a companion magazine, *Fantastic Adventures*. So far as I ever heard, nobody read the story; at least nobody commented on it.

That started my career as a writer. The result was a vastly stepped-up program of production, which brought a vastly stepped-up flood of rejection slips. My success at failure was truly amazing. No reflections on the editors, however. When I re-read my stuff, I realized they were perfectly sane and sober and that buying it would have proved otherwise. That's why, when the editor sent me a photostat of this month's cover, together with complete and detailed instructions as to what kind of a story he wanted written around it, I was flabbergasted. I still don't know why he picked on a flop like me to write something so important. Maybe because I knew the locale wherein he wanted the story written.

Well, I wrote the story, and it was accepted. As far as local color is concerned, I used the name Warsaw about twice and now I'm more puzzled than ever — because, obviously, it wasn't local color the editor was buying.

I have a defense job, and it's quite an active one, which is tough on me, because I don't like strenuous work much. As a result, I get home in the evening so tired that sitting down on my posterior is sheer delight. And since my mind gets little exercise, it functions in spite of me, and writing comes easy. Until I got this job, I couldn't write much. Now I turn out two thousand words every evening (two nights a week out for the movies).

I'm married, and I imagine my wife sometimes gets very irritated by the clatter of my typewriter, but she took up some local patriotic work which has to do with collecting scrap, or something, so that keeps her busy three nights. Result is she isn't too bored, and the extra money I make buys us war bonds. We both realize we've got a war to win, and maybe that's why I feel that some of the writing in this story "Priestess of the Floating Skull" (what a thing to work into a modern war story!) is fairly convincing. And I got a great kick out of causing the hero to give the Nazis one kick in the pants after another.

When I first came to this country, I had to learn the English language, which took me ten long years. I'm naturally stupid, and I felt discouraged many times. And imagine learning English in Brooklyn! But I persisted, and finally, maybe because I had to concentrate on it so much, I felt lost without a pencil in hand, and took up writing.

I tried to write love fiction, largely because love magazines seemed to be an easy market. I was wrong. Never sold a love story. My trunk is full of them. My wife told me a year after we were married why they never sold. After which I can't understand why she married me.

Then I got a job on a newspaper (which has since gone on the rocks) and eventually got sacked because my reporting turned out to be more fictional than factual. Which ability would only go over with a certain Chicago newspaper!

A city paving crew drew me next, and my foreman claimed I was perfect for the end of the pick he put me on—and even went so far as to say the handle would have been unnecessary, since I filled that requirement to a tee.

Then I took a course in auto mechanics, which was so successful that my instructor advised me that he'd be willing to refund part of my money if only I'd never touch a wrench to any vehicle, because it would be a sin and a shame.

But I did learn how to cause a union between nuts and bolts, which is what I'm doing now. The fact that the nuts can't slip—a clever new invention—may have something to do with the fact that I'm holding my job.

DISCUSSIONS

AMAZING STORIES will publish in each issue a selection of letters from readers. Everybody is welcome to contribute. Bouquets and brickbats will have an equal chance. Inter-reader correspondence and controversy will be encouraged through this department. Get in with the gang and have your say.

AGAINST SERIALS

Sirs:

I have been reading AMAZING STORIES and *Fantastic Adventures* for at least three years, even though I am now only fourteen years old. I've finished the March issue and I'd rate the stories as follows: (In order of publication.)

1. The Metal Monster—Very well written and excellently illustrated on the cover.
2. The New Adam—A good story and a different plot; but I don't like serials.
3. The Light That Killed—Both the story and the character were good. How about more?
4. Bring Back My Body—One of the most humorous stories I have read yet.
5. The Money Machine—Corny!!!
6. Victory from the Void—Interesting, with a good ending.
7. Bill Caldron Goes to the Future—Much too short.
8. Shadow of the Spider—Passable.

Your covers are usually good, but let's have more space ships on 'em.

The features are all very interesting.

Incidentally, how about some more long novels? But no more serials. Every time I get hold of one I try to wait till I have them complete, but I can never hold out.

I'm looking forward eagerly to Bond's That Worlds May Live. And please get Binder to give us more of Adam Link.

HARVEY MANDEL,
2729 Valentine Avenue,
New York, N. Y.

We present serials from time to time because many readers ask for them. But they are never extended beyond two issues. . . . By this time, you have read Bond's That Worlds May Live, and we're sure it was all that you expected. We have no word on future Adam Link stories.—Ed.

HE TAKES ELEVENTH PLACE!

Sirs:

Well, here I am again! Boy, was I surprised when I opened to the Discussions and there, no more than eleven letters from the front, was my contribution! You could have knocked me down with a feather (or less). But I was proud.

I have just finished the March issue of AMAZING STORIES, and I can't resist sending you my opinion of how the stories rate.

1. The Metal Monster—Tell Mr. Jarvis to send us more of this type.
2. The Light That Killed—Hit him again; he's only bleeding!
3. The New Adam—Better than I expected.
4. The Money Machine—Serves them right!
5. Victory from the Void—Hmmm.
6. Shadow of the Spider—Oh, well.
7. Bring Back My Body—Impossible.
8. Bill Caldron Goes to the Future—What no Xeno water????

There they are and I think I'd better leave out my address, just in case. Now to the Art Gallery. Fuqua's Metal Monster was one of his finest. But who is Settles? I never heard of him before, although his painting was fine.

CALVIN STEINGOLD,
623 Manida Street,
New York, N. Y.

We'll make it second place this time—for effort! Your remarks on the stories vary from some of the other readers'. And Settles is—Settles. He's appeared in our pages many times before.—Ed.

"GENUINE LITERATURE"

Sirs:

This is the first time I have written any kind of letter to a magazine. But I felt I must tell you how much I enjoyed The New Adam.

In my estimation, it has raised your magazine from the better-than-average scientific fiction to the field of genuine literature. May I compliment your editors on their intelligence, foresight and courage in presenting this magnificent study to the readers of scientific fiction? Let's have more like it!

THELMA ABEL,
671 West 162 Street,
New York, N. Y.

We are very pleased that you liked Weinbaum's The New Adam. The book is now out of print but we are sure any book dealer can get a copy for you.—Ed.

A LOT TO SAY

Sirs:

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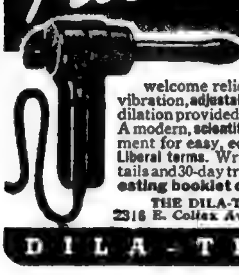

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Short stories are okay, but let's have more longer stories. However, try to put them in one issue. Many times the serials are the best stories, and after you've finished the first half you have forgotten it by the time you get the second half.

Your covers are excellent. Keep it up. Illustrations are fine. Try to have them follow the stories more closely.

For artists I like Finlay, Magarian, Paul and St. John. For authors I like Burroughs, P. F. Costello and Swain. Also, let's have more of Weinbaum, Wilcox and Jenkins, Jr. Robert Moore Williams scored in Blitz Against Japan and The Lost Warship.

The Observatory and Scientific Mysteries are tops. Try to put a Meet the Author in each mag. Put at least *two* clips in each copy. It takes a magician to keep it together otherwise.

Here's how I rate the February issue:

1. The New Adam—I can hardly wait for the rest.
2. A Pawn for a King—Well written.
3. Skeleton Men of Jupiter—Always Burroughs!
4. The Persian Carpet—Fine reading.
5. Visitor to Earth—Keep Costello.
6. Phantom Transport—Good.
7. Ard of the Sunset People—Okay.
8. Phantom of the Film—Phooey.

Stanley Guy,
Box 94,
Ringling, Mont.

For a reader who had a lot to say, Stanley, you didn't leave us much that needed defending! Wilcox will appear in the June issue of Fantastic Adventures. *As for long stories, you'll notice we've given you plenty of them recently. They'll continue that way.—Ed.*

"NO NOTHING!"

Sirs:

L-o-u-s-y is all I can say; positively lousy. How Paul Miles' story, Bill Caldron Goes to the Future, ever got into Amazing Stories is beyond me. It is without exception the worst science-fiction story ever to see print. What a story!—no plot, no outstanding characters, a rotten attempt at humor, no science, no writing ability—no nothing! I repeat: L-o-u-s-y!

The rest of the issue was very good, as Amazing always is. The stories as I list them, follows:

1. The New Adam—The best story in both the February and March issues.
2. The Metal Monster and The Money Machine.
3. The Light That Killed.
4. Victory from the Void and Bring Back My Body.
5. Shadow of the Spider—Still trying to kill off all of Earth's women, I see.

The front cover was swell. The back cover, while not up to Paul's work, was also very good. The interior art work was fine except for Jackson. I still think he should be illustrating comic books.

The whole issue was fine except for pages 196 to 200. They should not have been in at all.

Ronald J. De Freitas,
157 East 123 Street,
New York, N. Y.

We receive, daily, many manuscripts from young readers of both Amazing Stories *and* Fantastic Adventures. *Each represents the author's idea of what a science fiction story should be. Each is written in grim earnestness and complete honesty—not as something to amuse the editors, but as something worthy of being paid for and printed—Bill Caldron Goes to the Future was bought and printed—not only because it was excellent (though unintentional) satire, but because it represents the effort of an unprofessional writer in a highly specialized field. And we welcome those manuscripts and read them all. Some day, some of these nonprofessional writers are going to be professional craftsmen.—Ed.*

NOT ENOUGH SCIENCE?

Sirs:

I am writing to proclaim my opinion of the March issue of Amazing Stories, and my first criticism is that, as stated before, the stories do not have enough science in them. I don't expect to find stories that are crammed with heavy, technical theories; but the present run of material is adventure, pure and simple. As an example to uphold my argument, I cite the story, The Metal Monster. This had an almost complete lack of science; it is named after the huge robot, obviously a highly complex, scientific mechanism, yet not important enough in the plot to receive a complete description. There is not one word in the story about the internal workings of the robot.

Now to get on with the rest of the stories. I am listing the stories in order, from best to worst.

1. The New Adam—Truly a masterpiece!
2. The Metal Monster—The cover depicting the story was excellent.
3. Bring Back My Body.
4. The Light That Killed.
5. Victory from the Void.
6. Shadow of the Spider.
7. Bill Caldron Goes to the Future.
8. The Money Machine—Ugh!

Incidentally, is Amazing Stories planning to reprint any of E. E. Smith's Skylark series? There have certainly been enough requests for such. As for other reprint material, what about some of the works of H. G. Wells, such as The Time Machine, War Between Worlds and Trip to the Moon?

The art work in Amazing Stories is becoming increasingly better, and the novels, although mostly adventure, are still good reading. So increase the stories with real science in them and I, for one, will be well satisfied.

Neil Crandall,
314 North 33 Street,
Omaha, Nebr.

"When is a science story not a science story?" has been the subject of controversy ever since

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your editors can remember. We believe—and we've said it before—that the accent should be on the story and people and science. Most of our readers seem to agree with us on the subject. . . . The Skylark series is not being considered as reprint material.—Ed.

COVER SOLD HIM

Sirs:

Here you find another first letter. Not only am I a new writer but also a new reader in the science and fantasy fiction fields. I would like to say that I enjoy this field very much.

I have read a large number of magazines since becoming interested in this field and I think that your magazine leads the list by a large margin. I believe your companion, *Fantastic Adventures* must be given second place.

And now to the work at hand. First, I will consider the cover. It was the cover on your March iss which prompted me to purchase it. It is by far the best cover I have yet seen. And wonder of wonders, it fits perfectly into the story. Keep up the good work, Mr. Fuqua, and more metal monster covers.

Now come the stories. I liked the New Adam but was a little disappointed as I was told it was a super classic and I do not consider it that. It was a very good story, however.

1. The Metal Monster—A very good story and well written. Hope to see more of Jarvis in your pages. One thing puzzled me: if there was such a scarcity of metal that the Uighurs couldn't repair their planes, then where did the metal come from to build the monster?
2. The Money Machine—It was a very old plot which I have seen many times in other types of magazines, but Clee Garson has a style of writing which made it appeal to me.
3. The Light That Killed—This story was poor, but the rest were so much worse that they pushed this up to third.
4. Shadow of the Spider—Very poor.
5. Tie between Victory from the Void and Bring Back My Body. Fairly well written but they just didn't click.
7. Bill Caldron Goes to the Future. No more of Miles, please.

All your departments are tops, especially Discussions. I have not found a better letter department in any magazine. Please continue all the features.

The back cover was swell and I believe it is a very good idea. The inside art work was swell. Paul's illustration for The Metal Monster was magnificent. I did not like either of Finlay's pictures. Paul's for The Light That Killed was good but seems to be somewhat like his other. Fuqua was good for The Money Machine. Jackson was terrible.

Would like to see more old classics like the New Adam in your future issues.

Arthur Spoonemore,
Pomeroy, Washington.

THE POINTING FINGER

Sirs:

This is my first letter to a s.f. magazine, and I write it only because I feel like heaping you with plaudits on the best damn story ever to come out of the fertile minds of your illustrious writers (or indeed those of any other s.f. magazine, bar none). I am, of course, referring to S. G. Weinbaum's story, The New Adam. I'm sitting around with bated breath, waiting for the second installment, and if it doesn't come pretty soon, I'm going to have my fingernails chewed up to my elbows.

I rate the stories as follows:

1. The New Adam—Miles ahead! 10 points.
2. Skeleton Men of Jupiter—Burroughs seems to be the old standby and is always good. 8 points.
3. Persian Carpet. Good story; good author. 8 points.
4. Phantom from the Film. Okay. 6½ points.
5. A Pawn for a King. Okay. 6½ points.
6. Visitor to Earth. Passable. 6 points.
7. Phantom Transport. The first one was good but the least said about this one the better. 4 points.
8. Ard of the Sunset People. Phew! 4 points.

Everyone may not agree with me on this, but I'll stand by my guns.

Bill Senning, Jr.
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STORIES of the STARS

By MORRIS J. STEELE

Procyon, In Canis Minor

This star is one of the giants of the cosmos. It dwarfs our own sun into nothingness with its size

(See back cover)

CANIS MINOR, the Little Dog, is a constellation about 20° south of Castor and Pollux. It is marked by the bright star Procyon, which means "before the dog," because it rises about half an hour before the Dog Star, Sirius.

Alpha, Beta, and Gamma form a configuration closely resembled by that formed by Alpha, Beta, and Gamma Arietis. Procyon, Alpha Orionis, and Sirius form nearly an equilateral triangle, with sides of about 25°.

Procyon is a double star consisting of one bright and one very faint component.

According to legend, the Little Dog, personified by Procyon, was supposed to be one of Orion's dogs, although some say the dog belonged to Icarus, whom they identify with Boötes.

Naturally, very little is known about the star itself, because of its tremendous distance from our own solar system. However, astronomers do know enough about it to enable us to picture how it might appear from one of its planets.

Taking these facts, science fiction artist Frank R. Paul, perhaps today's most famous illustrator of scientific subjects carried forward into imagination, has depicted for us his concept, embodying symbolism, a scene on such a planet. He has shown us how Procyon might look during a period when its fainter component is in eclipse with its brighter component.

He has pictured the bright star as brilliantly white, generating tremendous heat and light. The smaller star is a low-heat body radiating only light from the lower end of the visual spectrum. This smaller body is only one-half the diameter of the larger body. Its surface, perhaps, is partly solidified, and may possess markings which might later be identified as huge "continents" when the star has cooled enough to become what it actually is, a planetary member of the system of which Procyon is the parent. Astronomers call it a double star because of the tremendous size of body bodies and of the relatively small distance between them.

It is this minor distance, and the huge mass, which leads artist Paul to picture a devastating scene on the small planet (as large as our own Earth) which circles the double star.

When the two "suns" eclipse, a greatly increased gravity attraction is the result. Thus, on the planet, a tidal wave results which takes in not only the water of the world, but the earth itself. Continents roll in upon themselves in a great wave which sweeps cities and plains alike into nothingness before them.

Procyon's double stars revolve around each other slowly, and the planets of the system may revolve even more slowly, so that a "year" may be many centuries long.

Thus, the inhabitants of the particular world Paul has illustrated have built a great city, unsuspecting of the great tragedy which will visit them with the interplay of combined forces beyond all their imagination.

When the planet and the two suns finally line up, the combined gravity results in a disaster which sweeps the city into ruins.

This whole process is a slow, majestic one, somewhat like the slow creep of lava from a volcano, and not at all like the tidal wave we might suppose it to be from observation of tidal waves on our earth. Here, on giant worlds, the scope of released energies is on a tremendous scale, and to us, the movement would be slow and inexorable. Paul has pictured two continents rolling up one on the other, with shorelines battling against each other, but being heaped up into mountain ranges which roll over the cities, crushing them into dust.

Even during an eclipse, there is no night on this planet such as during an Earth eclipse. The larger size of the bright sun is only partly dimmed, so that an eerie blood-red light is the result. This must be a terrifying sight, and truly significant to any inhabitants of the planet who must view it as the very clap of doom.

With such a tremendous spectacle in the heavens, the people of this world must naturally worship the double sun as their god. And when the larger god "eats" the smaller god, he gets great convulsions which have their effect on the planets. Truly, Procyon is a system of catastrophe! And each eclipse must be remembered by the inhabitants as the legend of the Deluge is remembered on Earth; except that on this planet the deluge is not one of water, but of grinding, monstrous, incredible masses of earth, piled up into a wave of destruction such as mere man has never seen.

CORRESPONDENCE CORNER

Martha Van Dyke, 1005 Cobb Ave., Kalamazoo, Michigan, age 17, wishes to correspond with boys and girls everywhere . . . Michael Andrews, 7304 Tioga St., Pittsburgh, Pa., 17 years old, wants to have pen pals living in Central and South America, Africa, Alaska, or any other country outside of the U. S. . . . Anyone who can see can be an amateur astronomer. Further information about the hobby of Astronomy may be secured from "World Astronomy Club"—Secretary: Mr. Abraham Oshinsky, 108 Fort Greene Place, Brooklyn, N. Y. . . . Helene Nathan, 1651 Montgomery Ave., Bronx, N. Y., is Flight Leader of a small flight of girls. She would like to hear from other girls who would like to join her flight. They build model airplanes and learn about real ones. Members must be between 10-16 years old . . . Laura Tagg, R.F.D. 2, Allegan, Mich., wants pen pals. Her hobbies are Large Letter Cards, Advertising Pencils and Buttons . . . Jerry Frankel, 441 Alabama Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y., is interested in trading scarce stamps for books, catalogues and price lists of ancient and medieval English coins, also back issues of coin magazines, and fine 19th century stamps and covers, and fine ancient and medieval silver coins . . . Anyone having the following issues of AMAZING STORIES write G. L. Roberts, Jr., Fairfield, N. C.: From 1939—January, September, October. From 1940—January, August, September, December. From 1942—January, February, March, April, May, June, July, August, September and October . . . Tom Ludowitz, 2310 Virginia, Everett, Wash., is sending out a new complete book list of the novels by Burroughs. List Free. . . . Donald A. Dow, 617 Eggert Rd., Buffalo, N. Y., 19, has just recovered from a long illness and would like to correspond with all his old correspondents or new ones. Will answer all letters. . . . Miss Florence Abel, R. R. 2, Box 120, Mt. Healthy, Ohio, wants pen pals in the service. . . . T. D. Gray, 171 Fullerton Ave., Newburgh, N. Y., wants to sell the following issues of Amazing Stories: Nov. and Dec., 1927 and Jan. to Nov. inclusive for the year 1928. . . . Howard Moore, 12210 Meyers Rd., Detroit, Mich., would like to hear from all interested in becoming members of his recently founded club for those interested in witchcraft, ghosts, mental telepathy, and other psychic phenomena, which is now called "Aicippa." He will be glad to answer all questions and will reply to all letters immediately. Anyone between 15-19 everywhere is welcome. . . . Miss Mary V. Durant, Calico Rock, Ark., 20 years old, would like to correspond with service men, but everyone is welcome. . . . Max Belz, Waldoboro, Maine, has back numbers of most all scientifiction from 1936 to date to dispose of at original price plus postage and wants to engage in correspondence chess with good players in 4 game series.

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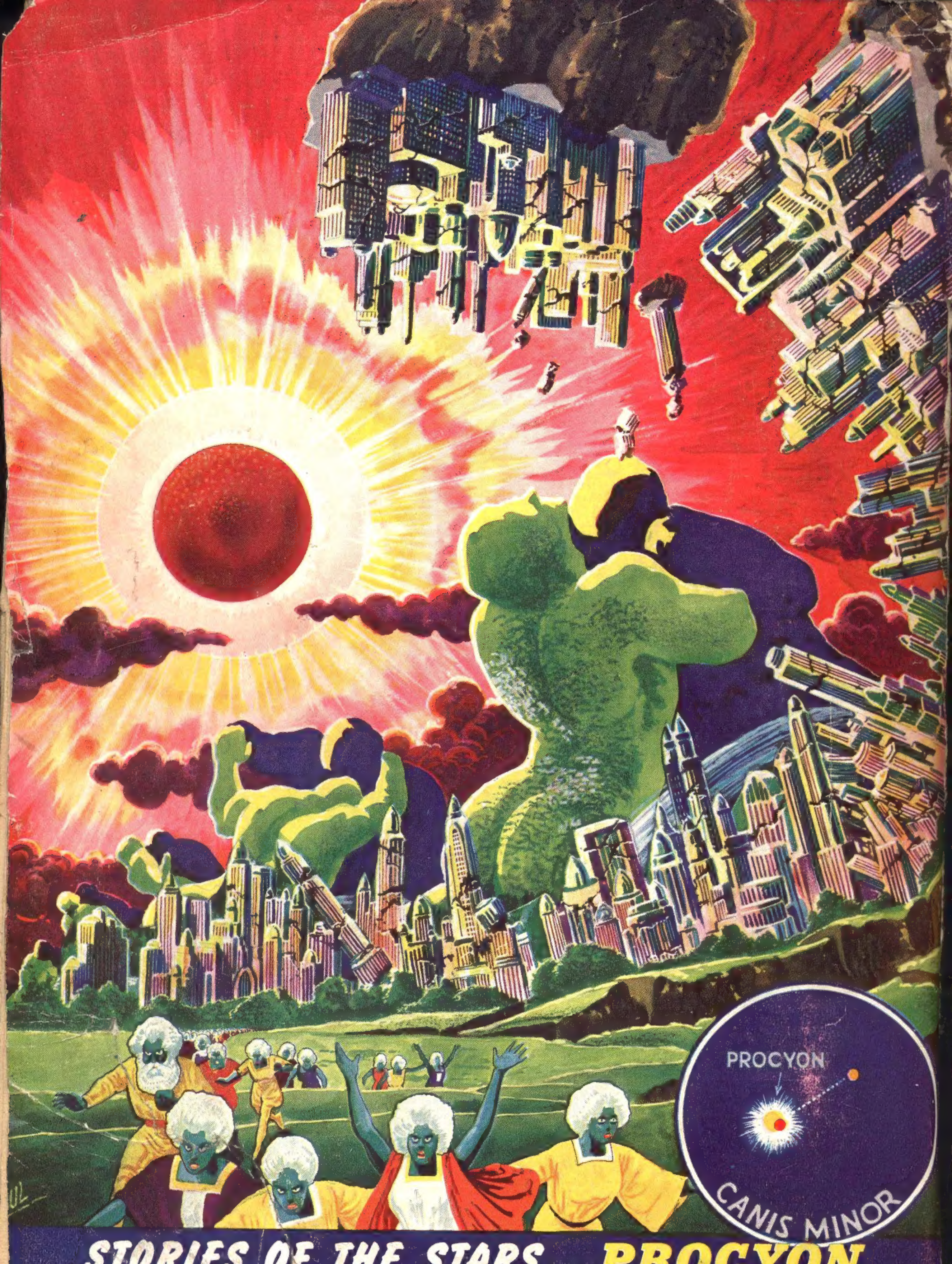
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